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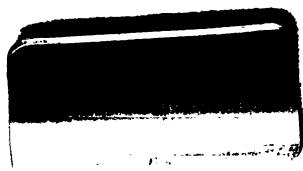
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# THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE BORDER

MOTOR  
BOYS  
SERIES



















THERE STALKED INTO THE CLEARING A NUMBER OF INDIANS.

*Motor Boys on the Border*

Page 146

# THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE BORDER

Or

Sixty Nuggets of Gold

BY

CLARENCE YOUNG

AUTHOR OF "THE MOTOR BOYS," "THE MOTOR BOYS  
IN THE CLOUDS," "THE RACER BOYS SERIES," "THE  
JACK RANGER SERIES," ETC.

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NEW YORK

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**THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE BORDER**

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## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. QUEER ACTIONS . . . . .	1
II. A TOWN GONE MAD . . . . .	12
III. DISAPPOINTMENT . . . . .	22
IV. AN UNEXPECTED INTERRUPTION . . . . .	32
V. NODDY NIXON THREATENS . . . . .	41
VI. FORMING THE SYNDICATE . . . . .	49
VII. A NIGHT CHASE . . . . .	56
VIII. MAROONED . . . . .	63
IX. NODDY PACKS UP . . . . .	75
X. AN AIRSHIP FLIGHT . . . . .	84
XI. OFF FOR THE BORDER . . . . .	92
XII. THE PROFESSOR IS MISSING . . . . .	99
XIII. A SUSPICIOUS CHARACTER . . . . .	107
XIV. IN KABSPELL . . . . .	117
XV. OFF IN THE MOTORSHIP . . . . .	125
XVI. A FRIGHTENED SETTLEMENT . . . . .	135
XVII. THE BLACKFEET . . . . .	142
XVIII. BEAR STEAKS . . . . .	147
XIX. ON GUARD . . . . .	154

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## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XX. A NIGHT ATTACK . . . . .	164
XXI. INTO THE DEPTHS . . . . .	170
XXII. A DISAPPOINTED PROFESSOR . . . . .	177
XXIII. WATCHED . . . . .	184
XXIV. THE LUMINOUS SNAKES . . . . .	190
XXV. THE HIDDEN MAN . . . . .	196
XXVI. THE EMPTY POCKET . . . . .	204
XXVII. A PERILOUS SEARCH . . . . .	211
XXVIII. THE SIXTY NUGGETS . . . . .	217
XXIX. INTERNATIONAL COMPLICATIONS . . . . .	225
XXX. A FLIGHT BY NIGHT . . . . .	239

## INTRODUCTION

### MY DEAR BOYS:

When Jerry, Ned and Bob returned from an automobile ride one day, and saw a great crowd around the railroad station of their home town, they were somewhat excited. They were made more so when they saw Jim Nestor, the foreman of the mine in which they held an interest, and another Westerner, wildly digging on the tracks. And when they heard the murmurs of "gold," they did not know what to think.

And from then on they were involved in happenings that did not cease when they set out to recover the sixty nuggets, so strangely hidden on the border. Though the gold on the railroad tracks did not amount to much, the other pocket of the precious yellow metal did, as you will learn in the pages that follow.

In this book you may also read of the search Professor Snodgrass made for some luminous snakes, and how he found them; and I have also taken pleasure in writing for you an account of how Noddy Nixon tried to get away from the motor boys the gold they worked so hard for,

## INTRODUCTION

and how our heroes braved even the perils of a band of Blackfeet Indians, who had escaped from their reservation.

That you will like this book as well as you have the others of the series, is the sincere wish of

Your true friend,

CLARENCE YOUNG.

# THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE BORDER

## CHAPTER I

### QUEER ACTIONS

"WHAT's the matter, Bob, can't you crank an auto yet?"

"I sure can!" exclaimed a stout lad, who was bending over in front of a big car, laboriously grinding away at the starting handle.

"Then do it," advised a tall youth at the wheel. "Turn it over good and hard."

"Yes, go ahead," put in a good-natured looking chap in one of the rear seats. "We don't want to stay here all day, even if it is a nice place."

"All—right—here—she—goes!" panted stout Bob Baker, as he again turned the crank.

There was only the noise of the flywheel spinning around; a sort of cough and wheeze, but no whirr and throb that told of an explosion of gas in the cylinders.

"Oh, if you can't get her started let me try!" exclaimed Ned Slade, the lad in the tonneau. "I thought you'd had practice enough, Bob."

"That's right," remarked Jerry Hopkins, the lad at the wheel. "Keep at it, Bob, it'll take off some of that extra flesh."



## 2 THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE BORDER

"Oh, you——!" began the fat lad, and then he stopped to gaze in some astonishment at his chum, Ned, who had started to leave the rear seat, with the evident intention of trying his hand at the crank. For on Ned's face there was a curious look as he gazed over Jerry's shoulder at the switch, just under the overhang on the dashboard of the car. Then a broad grin illuminated Ned's features, to be succeeded by a hearty laugh.

"Huh!" ejaculated Bob. "I don't see anything to go into spasms over. If you think it's so funny come out here and try it yourself. I never saw such a cranky car. It went all right a while ago, and now——"

"It's all because you don't know how to crank it—that's the reason it's cranky," began Jerry. "I'll show you——"

"No—don't—Oh, ho! Sit still—Oh, me! Oh my! Wait until I get my breath—Oh dear!" and Ned with one hand on the steersman's shoulder held his own side with the other to help repress his mirth.

"Well of all the——" began Bob, half in anger.

"No wonder he couldn't crank it!" cried Ned. "You haven't got the switch on, Jerry. There's no current—Oh dear! and to think that Bob was breaking his back and never getting a spark——"

"Was that the trouble?" cried Jerry.

"It sure was," replied Ned, and, stepping on

the footboard he reached to the dash, and snapped on the switch which connected the batteries with the spark plug in the cylinder heads. "Now try it, Bob!" he called.

"Not much!" exclaimed the fat lad, with great determination. "I'm done—finished! If you fellows don't know enough to throw on the switch after all these years of running a car, and then expect to sit there and grin your heads off while I break my back cranking, you're mighty much mistaken—that's all I've got to say. You may think it's a joke, but I don't! I'm through with you," and turning on his heel, after flashing a look at his two chums, Bob Baker started off down the road afoot.

"Here, where are you going?" called Jerry, after him.

"Home!" was the short answer, "and I'm not going out with you fellows again in a hurry!"

Ned and Jerry looked at one another. It was the first time in a long while that there had been any serious difference among the three chums.

"Oh, come on back!" urged Ned, for he saw that Bob was very much in earnest. "Come on back."

"Not on your life!" snapped Bob. "I'm through."

"We didn't mean anything," went on Ned,

#### 4 THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE BORDER

starting after his friend. "But it was so funny to see——"

"Ha! Ha! Joke!" sneered Bob. "If it's so funny write it out and send it to the humorous column. You won't get another chance to laugh at me, though."

"He's mad, all right," murmured Ned.

"Looks so," agreed Jerry. "Oh, I say Bob!" the tall lad went on, "come on back. Honest, I didn't know the switch was off. Come on back. It's a good ways to Cresville, and we've only just started the run. Come on back, and you can steer, and I'll crank up. And if we get a puncture Ned and I'll put on a new tire, and you won't even have to get out of the car. I mean it!"

The figure, stalking down the road in anger, was seen to hesitate the merest trifle. But Bob did not turn around.

"That almost fetched him," said Jerry. "Say something, Ned."

"We'll stop at the first place we come to, and get a bite to eat, even if it isn't noon," shouted the lad who had discovered the disconnected switch. "That ought to do the business," he added, in lower tones.

It seemed to be, for Bob halted, appeared to be considering the matter at length, and then turned around.

"Does all that go?" he demanded.

"Sure," chorused Ned and Jerry.

"And about me not having to help sweat putting on a tire?"

"That's right," Jerry assured him. Bob came slowly back.

"All the same," he spoke as he climbed into the tonneau, "it was no fun cranking a car with the switch off."

"We agree with you," said Jerry, winking at Ned with the eye concealed from his offended chum. "But it wasn't intentional," he added, soothingly, as he went to the crank. "Go ahead, Bob, you can steer if you want to."

"I don't know as I want to. If we get a puncture you might blame it on me."

"All right, then I'll take the wheel," went on Jerry, as the motor throbbed and hummed when he had turned the crank, for the car, though a good one, was not a self-starter.

"But everything else goes," proceeded Bob, as the machine glided smoothly down the road. "And we stop at the first place where we can get sandwiches and ginger ale. I'm hungry."

"You always——" began Ned, but Jerry stopped him with a nudge in the ribs.

"Keep your foot on the soft pedal," he advised, in a whisper, for the two lads were on the

## 6 THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE BORDER

front seat, with Bob in the rear. "No use getting him ruffled again."

The three chums had taken advantage of a fine spring day to take a ride in their auto about the country near Cresville, a town not far from Boston. They had not gone far before they came to a delightful spot, where a roadside spring offered a chance to drink, and they took it. In stopping the car, Jerry had thrown out the switch, and when, with their thirst quenched, they wanted to start off again, the incident I have just narrated took place.

But now everything seemed to have been smoothed out, though Bob thought to himself that he had gotten a little the best of the bargain. He felt sure his chums had played no trick on him, in having him crank up without the switch being on, for it frequently had happened before that one of them forgot to make the electrical connection.

"But I get out of that tire work," thought Bob, as the car swung along; "and they won't guy me when I want something to eat. I guess we're even."

"Going to any place in particular?" asked Ned of Jerry, as the tall lad swung the machine around a curve.

"No, I just thought we'd run out for ten miles or so, and get back in time for lunch. Or we

can stop at a roadhouse, and spend the whole day touring if you like. I was going——”

“Look out!” suddenly yelled Bob, for Jerry had turned to speak to Ned, and his eyes were not on the road ahead. “Look out or you’ll go over that dog!”

There was a scurrying in the dust as a yellow cur rushed from a roadside house, directly at the auto. Bob spoke only just in time, for Jerry, with a quick turn of the wheel, sent the car to one side with a dangerous swerve, but avoiding the dog.

The beast, with sharp barks, seemed to enjoy the confusion he had caused. Jerry, with muttered comments on all such dogs in general, and this one in particular, was swinging back into the road again, when there came a sharp hiss of air, and the auto settled slightly on one side.

“Oh, rats!” cried Ned. “A puncture!”

“It was that dog’s fault!” exclaimed Jerry, wrathfully. “I hit that board with a nail in it when I turned out for him. We ought to make the man who owns him pay us for a brand new tire.”

“That’s right,” agreed Ned, while Jerry guided the disabled car beneath a big tree, that they might take advantage of the shade in substituting a new inner tube for the punctured one. The dog, evidently thinking that the lads were

## 8 THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE BORDER

stopping to take revenge on him, fled into the house, his tail between his legs.

"Here's where I watch you fellows work!" exclaimed Bob, with a chuckle.

"All right! What we said goes!" declared Jerry. "Come on, Ned. Get busy."

The car was soon jacked up, and the shoe taken off by Jerry, while Ned got out a new inner tube and proceeded to partially inflate it ready to slip it in in place of the damaged one.

"Say, this shoe sticks!" said Jerry, who was working hard. "Here, Ned, give me a hand."

"Can't for a minute. I've got to fill this tube."

"Aw, say, I'll help!" exclaimed Bob, who, all the while, in spite of the promise of immunity made to him, had fidgeted while sitting there comfortably while his chums worked. "I can't be as mean as all that."

"I thought not," remarked Jerry, and then, with the help of his fat chum, he soon had the shoe off. The three made short work of changing the tire; and a little later they were on their way once more.

"There's an eating place!" exclaimed Bob eagerly, as they swung up toward a roadside stand. "We got some dandy sandwiches there once."

"And you haven't forgotten it," chuckled Ned. "All right, I'll stand treat. Slow up, Jerry."

A little later the three were drinking cool ginger ale and munching the bread and meat.

"I notice," said Bob, as he casually took a bite, "that you fellows are eating with about as good an appetite as I have, in spite of the fun you made."

"Oh, I admit I was hungry," said Ned, as he held out his glass.

"Same here," added Jerry. "It was working on that tire, I guess."

It was nearly noon when they neared Cresville again, after swinging about in a ten-mile circle. They had greatly enjoyed the little trip, and were discussing whether or not they would take advantage of the following Saturday for a motor boat ride, or for a spin in their airship, since the chums possessed both those means of locomotion.

"I vote for the airship," said Bob. "We don't have to look out for punctures, and there's no danger of getting stuck as in a motor boat."

"Well, I'd like the boat," said Ned. "But if you want the airship I'm willing. Noddy Nixon is back in town, though, I hear, and if we start flying he's almost sure to do the same thing, and generally he manages to camp on our trail, somehow. But maybe we can shake him."

"I guess so," put in Jerry Hopkins. "We'll—Hello!" he cried, suddenly interrupting himself, as the car swung around a curve, and approached



a railroad crossing. "What's going on at the depot?" he asked.

"There's a crowd all right," asserted Bob.

"An accident, I guess!" exclaimed Ned. "The through train must have just passed along, and hit someone! Put on speed, Jerry!"

The tall lad did so, and the car shot ahead.

"No, there doesn't seem to be anybody hurt," spoke Bob. "I can't see any ambulance. The crowd seems to be watching two men who—by Jinks! What *are* they doing?" he finished.

"I see 'em," added Ned. "They seem to be digging between the rails."

"And yet they don't look like section hands," spoke Jerry. "They seem more like Westerners. Look at their big hats!"

"And red shirts," remarked Bob. "Yet they're grubbing between the ties for all they're worth. That's queer."

"And see how excited the crowd is," added Ned.

"Yes, and look at Mr. Hitter, the freight agent!" cried Jerry. "He's hopping up and down like a hen on a hot griddle. We must see what's going on!"

"Surest think you know!" agreed Bob. "Maybe it's a lawsuit against the railroad, and they're tearing up the tracks."

With the boys eagerly looking ahead, the auto

approached nearer the throng that surrounded two men whose strange actions seemed to fascinate those in the throng. Then Jerry uttered a queer cry.

"Look!" he fairly shouted. "One of those men is Jim Nestor, who is in charge of our mine in Arizona! What can he be doing East? Fellows, there's something queer going on here!"

## CHAPTER II

### A TOWN GONE MAD

WITH a screech of the brakes, the auto came to a stop not far from the throng that surrounded the two men, who were still digging away with sticks between the railroad tracks. The three lads leaped out, wormed their way through the press of persons, and, gaining a place where they could get a better view, looked on in wonder.

"It's Jim all right," murmured Bob.

"Then he must have left our mine to shift for itself," said Jerry.

"Maybe it's no good any more," suggested Ned. "Jim Nestor wouldn't leave that gold mine without some good reason."

Ned had spoke louder than he intended, and at his words one of the men looked up. A smile illuminated his bronzed face, and he called out:

"By crickey! There are the boys!"

"Jim Nestor!" exclaimed Jerry. "What brings you East? We thought you were at our mine!"

"I just had to come!" replied he who an-

swered to the name of Jim Nestor. "Boys, it's a queer story, but I've got something else on hand just now—me and Harvey Brill here. I'll be with you in a few minutes, just as soon as we see how far this lode goes," and he began digging again with his stick between the ties.

And now, may I beg your indulgence for just a moment or two—you, my new readers—while I explain a little bit about the three boys who are to be the heroes of this story? Those of you who have read the previous books in this series may skip this part, as I know you will, but others may care to know a little more about Bob Baker, Jerry Hopkins and Ned Slade.

The three chums had lived for several years in the New England town of Cresville. Bob was the son of Mr. Andrew Baker, a rich banker; Jerry the only son of a well-to-do widow—Mrs. Julia Hopkins; while Ned's father, Aaron Slade, was a well-known department store proprietor.

The boys' acquaintance began when they each became possessed of bicycles, and went on trips together. Then they got motor cycles, as related in the first volume of the series, "The Motor Boys," and, winning a race, they got an auto as a prize.

In their car they went on a tour overland, with a certain Professor Snodgrass, an enthusiastic collector of bugs and insects for various colleges and museums. The professor was quite a character.

## 14 THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE BORDER

After their tour overland, during which many exciting incidents happened, the motor boys traveled to Mexico, discovering a buried city, and came home across the plains, on which trip they discovered the hermit of Lost Lake.

About this time motor boating came much into prominence, and our three heroes, of course, had to have a water craft. How they got one, and made many a trip in it, is told in the book, "The Motor Boys Afloat." Their voyage on the Atlantic was filled with adventures of moment, and when they went to the strange waters of the Florida Everglades they had trials and troubles as well as a good time.

Their journey to the Pacific enabled them to locate a strange derelict, after considerable hardships.

It was to be expected, with the progress made in navigating the air, that the motor boys would, sooner or later, want a biplane, or some craft that could take them above the earth. In the book "The Motor Boys in the Clouds," I related how they went on a long trip for fame and fortune, while later, when they went over the Rockies, they solved a strange mystery of the air. Then they traveled over the ocean and made a marvelous rescue in mid-air.

Getting on the wing again, they sought the airship treasure, and in the book that immediately

precedes this one, called "The Motor Boys After a Fortune," I related how the three chums sought to locate a quantity of radium, said to be deposited in the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. Incidentally they located a hut on Snake Island, and rescued a celebrated scientist.

The boys had not been back home very long when the present story opens. I might add that though the lads had many friends they had one or two enemies, of whom Noddy Nixon, a rival airship enthusiast, was one, together with his crony, Bill Berry. Noddy and Bill never lost a chance to do our friends a bad turn.

In one of their many adventures the boys had met with Jim Nestor, an old miner and prospector, and they had been able to help him locate a rich gold mine in Arizona. The boys were given shares in it for their help, and Mr. Nestor remained out West to work the claim, sending the boys their profits at intervals. It can well be imagined how surprised the lads were when they saw the old miner in their home town, engaged in the curious occupation of digging in the dirt between the railroad tracks.

"He must be crazy!" exclaimed Bob.

"What's he up to, anyhow?" asked Ned.

"Sure, they're both crazy!" declared a man in the throng about the depot. "They got off the through train a little while ago, and one of them

## 16 THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE BORDER

—that big fellow—right away started to dig in the dirt with an old broom handle. Then the other did the same thing, and they've been at it ever since. Do you boys know 'em?"

"One of them—Jim Nestor—is the foreman at a gold mine in which we have an interest," said Jerry. "The other I don't know, except that Jim said his name was Harvey Brill."

"Well, they're both crazy," said the man.

"That one chap may be—but not Jim Nestor," declared Jerry, with a positive shake of his head. "Jim knows what he is doing, and I guess his partner does, too."

"But what are they doing?" asked the man. "Have they lost something?"

"I don't know," answered Jerry. "But I'll soon find out. I'll ask Jim——"

He was interrupted by a shout from the man designated as Harvey Brill. He dropped his stick, caught up a piece of rock, and cried:

"I knew it! You can't fool me, Jim, when I see pay dirt! I got a glimpse of it as soon as we hopped off the steam cars. My eyes are good for something yet. Look there!"

"That's right. There's the yellow stuff as sure as you're born!" agreed Jim Nestor, as he critically examined the piece of rock his friend held out to him. "But how in the world do you reckon it ever got here—on the railroad track?"

"Give it up, but it's here all right. Now we'll have to get picks and shovels, a pan, a cradle maybe, and wash out some of the gravel, and——"

"Say, do you fellows want to be killed?" yelled Mr. Hitter, the freight, station and ticket agent, as he pushed through the crowd and confronted the two men. "Do you want to be run over?"

"Well, we ain't just hankering after it, stranger," said Jim Nestor, slowly. "Were you calculating on having us treated that way?"

"Why the down express is due in another minute!" cried Mr. Hitter. "If you don't get off the track you'll be run down! Get off I say!"

"Not just yet, son," said Harvey Brill, calmly. "This is too good a place to leave. If we've got a minute I may turn up another bit of pay dirt. It won't take me a second to get out of the way of the train, and that leaves me fifty-nine seconds to dig in."

"But you must get off the track!" insisted the agent. "You can't dig up the ballast that way. The rails may spread and cause an accident. Get out of the way! There's the whistle of the train!" and he rushed about, dancing up and down, pushing the crowd off the rails. "Leave the track alone!" he shouted, "I'll call out the police if you don't."

"I guess he's right, Harvey," said Jim Nestor, slowly. "We had better postpone our operations



a while. Besides, I want to introduce you to the friends of mine we came East to see."

"All right, Jim, I'm agreeable," assented the other, as he picked up some more bits of rock. "But I sure do hate to leave this pay dirt."

"Jim—Jim Nestor!" cried Jerry. "What's it all about, anyhow? Why are you here? What are you digging on the tracks for?"

"I'll tell you soon, Jerry," said the old miner. "We came East on purpose to see you, and just by accident we happened to see signs of gold in the track ballast here. Of course it——"

"Gold!" cried half a dozen in the throng.

"Sure, gold!" put in Harvey Brill. "You can't fool me on the yellow stuff," and he held out his hand in which several yellow particles gleamed dully.

"Gold! Gold!" murmured the crowd, eagerly.

"Come on! Tell us about it!" urged Ned.

"Yes, we've got our car here," added Jerry. "Come on to my house, Jim, and give us the story."

"I'm agreeable," assented the mine foreman. "Harvey, let me make you acquainted with three of the liveliest boys in the United States," and he presented Jerry, Ned and Bob.

"Glad to know you," spoke Mr. Brill. "I

sort of hate to leave these diggings," and he glanced back at the tracks; "but if there's a train coming I s'pose I've got to. But I can come back. It's as pretty a bit of pay dirt as I've seen in some time. Now where's the gasoline gig?"

"This way," spoke Jerry, leading his chums and friends through the throng. Mr. Hitter was having trouble. The crowd pressed across the tracks, eager to look at the place where the two miners had been digging.

"Get back! Get back!" cried the agent. "The express is coming!"

He fairly thrust the curious ones off the track as the whistle of the approaching train was heard. Into the auto hurried the boys and their friends and, forbearing to question Mr. Nestor and his acquaintance on the road, Jerry and his chums soon had them at his house.

"Now tell us all about it!" urged the tall lad. "Why are you here, Jim; and what do you want us to do?"

"What do I want you to do?" repeated Jim, slowly. "Well, I'll tell you. I want you to help my friend here—Harvey Brill—recover sixty nuggets of gold."

"Sixty nuggets of gold?" repeated the motor boys, in a chorus.

"That's it," said Mr. Brill, calmly. "Sixty nuggets, and all of 'em fairly big ones."

"Are they on the railroad track?" asked Bob.

"No, son, they're in the hardest valley to get to that I ever saw," replied the old miser; "and they're the prettiest nuggets I ever met up with. Sixty of 'em, and they're on the border between Montana and Canada. I need help to get 'em back again, and Jim here suggested you boys. If you'd like to have a try, and go through some of the wildest country you ever saw, why——"

But Mr. Brill was interrupted by a cry from without. There was a pounding of feet on the porch of the Hopkins home, and a shrill voice yelled:

"Hey, fellows—Bob—Jerry—Ned!—Come on out—big excitement—whole town gone gold-crazy—they're tearing up the railroad tracks—going to order out the militia—blow up the place with dynamite—people gone wild—taking up the ties—looking for nuggets—Hitter is dancing up and down—he's sent for the railroad president in a special train—come on—lots of fun—it's great—let's get some—come on!"

A silence followed, broken only by the rapid breathing of someone just outside the long windows of the library, opening on the porch, near which the motor boys and their friends sat.

"What's that—a phonograph broke loose?" asked Mr. Brill.

"I guess it's Andy Rush," said Jerry, laughing. "That's the way he always talks."

"Well, he wants to look out or he'll bust!" said the man who had spoken of the sixty nuggets of gold. "I never heard such rapid-fire conversation."

"Come on!" burst out Andy. "Everybody's going—they're wild—tearing up the tracks!"

"What do you suppose he means?" asked Ned.

"Give it up," replied Bob. "It's just some of his nonsense I guess."

"No—look!" cried Jerry, pointing through the window at several men and boys, with picks and shovels over their shoulders, hurrying toward the railroad. At the same time, from the direction of the station, which was not far from Jerry's house, could be heard a murmur of many voices.

"By Jove!" cried Ned. "Andy is right! The whole town has gone gold-crazy! Come on, fellows!" and he fairly leaped through the long window.

## CHAPTER III

### DISAPPOINTMENT

NED's chums were not long in following him, nor were the two Westerners far behind. Mrs. Hopkins, who had seen her son and his friends come in, wondered much at their sudden departure, with the excitable Andy Rush leading the procession.

"Oh, I just know something is going to happen!" exclaimed the widow. "I'm sure those boys are planning another of their wild trips."

"Well, never mind," said a friend who had called. "I'm sure it seems to do them good. But I wonder what it is this time?"

"So do I," said Jerry's mother.

In fact the motor boys themselves wondered much why Mr. Nestor had come East, bringing the friend who spoke so mysteriously of the sixty nuggets of gold. But there was no time now to question them, for the present excitement drove all other thoughts from their minds.

"What do you know about it, Andy?" questioned Jerry, as he raced along beside his small acquaintance.

"Not much—I was coming from the store—I had to get a loaf of bread and some——"

"Skip all that," interrupted Bob.

"Well, I saw a crowd at the railroad—big mob—all yelling—digging at the tracks—some said gold—they want to take up the rails—pull out the ties—move the cars off the tracks—Hitter is wild—he wants the militia——"

Andy had to stop for breath. The boys could hear the excitement as they came nearer the depot. It was evident that the excitable little chap was more than half right.

"Look at the crowd!" yelled Bob. "I should say they *were* crazy!"

"What does it all mean?" asked Ned.

"I expect we're to blame," replied Mr. Nestor.

"We started a gold rush, Harvey."

"Is there really gold there?" asked Jerry.

"There sure is," declared Mr. Brill. "You can't fool me on the yellow stuff."

"We just had a glimpse of it as we got off the train to come and see you," explained Jim.

"Nothing would do Harvey but he must prospect a bit, and we did—with broom handles we picked up."

"And the gold was there," declared his friend.

"But it isn't much that I got, though I'm going to look for more."

By this time they were close to the crowd.

Truly it was a frenzied throng. Men and boys were eagerly digging at the cinders and stone ballast between the rails and ties. Some had picks and shovels and others merely sticks, but one and all were tossing out the dirt, and eagerly looking for traces of gold.

"Here! Here! You're got to stop this!" cried the agent. "You'll have the rails all loose, and the trains will run off the tracks. Oh, won't somebody get the police? Send in a riot call! I want the militia! I'm going to wire the Governor for troops! I've sent for the directors of the railroad! This is awful!" and Mr. Hitter raced up and down the track.

Occasionally he would thrust aside some enthusiastic digger, who seemed to be undermining the rails, but this one's place was immediately taken by another. Up and down the tracks, for some distance, men and boys, and even some girls, were digging away furiously.

"Oh, this is awful!" groaned Mr. Hitter. "The road will be ruined!"

"Not if there's gold here!" exclaimed one man. "If the tracks are over a mine they can be moved. Better get a shovel, Hitter, and help yourself."

"You're crazy!" shouted the agent. "There is no gold here!"

"Yes, there is! Those fellows found some!"

declared the man, pointing at Mr. Nestor and his friend.

"Oh, it's all your fault!" cried the agent, addressing the motor boys and their friends. "You started this wild panic. Tell them there is no gold here!"

"But there *is* some!" insisted Mr. Brill, taking the yellow grains from his pocket. This seemed to make the crowd wilder than ever, and they pushed and shoved to get to the very place where the miner had found the golden particles.

"Oh, they'll all be killed!" cried the agent. "Here comes the other fast express! Get out of the way!" he yelled.

The crowd did not seem to hear him, and Jerry and his chums were beginning to get alarmed, when there was a rush from the other side of the track, and several officers, led by the chief of police, dashed up.

"Oh, Chief!" cried Mr. Hitter. "This is terrible! There won't be any railroad left, soon. Make 'em get back!" and he quickly told of the trouble, and explained about the coming train.

The chief acted without hesitation.

"Come, men!" he cried. "Get back or I'll arrest you. Officers, draw your clubs!" he cried sternly. "Use 'em if these persons don't get off the track. You're trespassing!" he added. "Get back!"



He emphasized his words by shoving away those nearest to him.

"Lend a hand here!" the chief called to the motor boys.

"Come on!" yelled Jerry. "It's partly our fault. Get 'em back out of the way of the train!"

The two Westerners lent their aid, and, much against their will, the mob got out of the path of the train, which whizzed past a moment later. The agent breathed a sigh of relief.

Many of the crowd had pieces of stone in which they detected yellow gleams. Others had hats or bags full of gravel.

"I'm going to have this tested at a jewelry store!" cried one man, as he rushed off up the street. His example was followed by others, and soon nearly half the crowd had started on a rush for the jeweler's.

"I wish they'd all go," said the freight agent. "Can't you keep 'em off the track, Chief?"

"I'll try, but it's all foolishness anyhow. There's no gold here."

"There is!" asserted Mr. Brill. "I found some," and he exhibited the yellow grains.

"But there isn't any more," declared Mr. Hitter. "I know there isn't. How can there be gold where none was ever found before—and in railroad ballast at that? Oh, if you don't want

to see all the tracks torn up, tell these crazy folks that there's no more gold here!" implored the agent.

"Well, I'll take a look and see," agreed Mr. Brill. "And I'm free to confess I don't see how this gold got here anyhow. Certainly it isn't the place for it, though some gold quartz might have gotten in the railroad ballast. But I'll take a look. Come on, Jim. You know pay dirt better than I do."

"All right," agreed the mine foreman. The crowd suspended operations while the two made a careful investigation, not only in the place where the first particles had been found, but for some distance up and down the track. While they were doing this, loud voices were heard off to one side of the track.

"Let me past!" demanded someone. "Shove 'em out of the way, Bill. We've got as good a right to this gold as any one!"

"It's Noddy Nixon!" exclaimed Jerry.

"Yes, and Bill Berry is with him," added Bob.

"They've got a wheelbarrow," said Ned.

It was true. The town bully and his crony, having heard the wild rumors of the gold "strike," had come with shovels and a barrow to carry away as much as they could of the track ballast.

"Here! You stop that!" yelled Mr. Hitter, as he saw Noddy and Bill shoveling heaps of rock and cinders into the barrow. "You can't do that—you'll ruin the roadbed!"

"Don't let him bother us, Bill," advised Noddy. "My father owns stock in this road, and I have as good a right to this gold as anybody."

He went on shoveling. Mr. Hitter raced up and down, calling for help, but no one paid much attention to him. All eyes were centered on the two miners. They made a careful examination, and then Jim Nestor announced:

"Nothing doing!"

"That's right," added his friend. "It's streaked out!"

"What?" cried the throng about them.

"No more gold," announced Jim. "It was just in that one spot, and it wasn't much at that. Not more than a few dollars worth. Your road is safe, stranger," and he nodded to Mr. Hitter.

"Thank goodness!" ejaculated the agent.

"But how did any gold get there?" asked Jerry.

"I don't know," replied Mr. Brill. "Some of the ballast might have been loaded in a car that had been out in the mining region, and some quartz might have got stuck in a crack, to fall out

when they unloaded here. But that's all the gold there is in these diggings," and once more he looked at the particles he possessed.

"What's that?" cried a fussy old gentleman, who had just come up, having only a few minutes before heard of the odd discovery. "You found gold, and think it came from quartz?"

"That's my theory," said Mr. Brill.

"Let me look at what you found," said the old gentleman, and the miner did so. The old gentleman chuckled. Then he exclaimed:

"Well, I never. If this isn't odd!"

"What is it?" asked Jerry.

"Why this is gold all right, but it isn't from any gold quartz. It's from my gold watch. It fell out of my pocket as I got off the train the other day, and rolled on the track. Before I could rescue it the train started and rolled over it. It was caught on the rails and ground to pieces, and some particles fell in the ballast. That's where your gold is from. I was in a hurry at the time, and as the watch was not a very valuable one I did not report it to Mr. Hitter, but went off home. I just returned from a trip, and I heard about this excitement. But that gold is from my watch as sure as anything. I recognize a small piece that had my initials on it—see," and he showed a bit of engraving.

"That's right," agreed Jim Nestor, slowly.

30 THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE BORDER

"It sure is," assented his partner. "The gold strike has fizzled out."

There was a groan of disappointment from the crowd.

"Stung!" cried one discouraged youth.

"Look!" cried Jerry, as he pointed to Noddy Nixon and Bill Berry, wheeling away a big barrow full of ballast, with Mr. Hitter racing wildly after them.

"Let him go," advised the old gentleman. "He won't come back after he has that assayed," and he chuckled.

"I guess not," agreed Mr. Nestor.

"I hope the sixty nuggets don't turn out that way," said Ned, in a low voice.

"Indeed they won't!" exclaimed Mr. Brill. "I'm sorry I caused such a rumpus, but I didn't mean to. I saw the gleam of gold as I got off the train, and it always excites me. But those sixty nuggets—they're as real as heart could wish. Now if you boys want to hear the yarn, I'm ready to tell you, seeing that this excitement has petered out."

"Indeed we do," said Jerry, as he led the way out of the crowd.

"And we'll help you recover the gold, too," added Bob.

"Indeed we will," came from Ned. "We were just wishing for some excitement."

"Well, you'll get it all right," was Mr. Nestor's opinion. "You'll get it if you reach the border with us and have a hunt for those sixty nuggets of gold. Come on, Harvey, and spin your yarn. I reckoned as how these lads would help us," and as they once more approached Jerry's house, while the disappointed crowd filed away from the railroad, they had a glimpse of Noddy Nixon and Bill Berry hurrying with their barrow of track ballast to the nearest jewelry store.

## CHAPTER IV

### AN UNEXPECTED INTERRUPTION

"SAY, fellows, it would be worth while going to see how he takes it," remarked Ned, with a chuckle.

"How who takes it?" inquired Jerry.

"And takes what?—explanation yourself," put in Bob, as the three chums, and their two Western friends, paused at Jerry's front gate. "Who are you talking about?"

"Noddy Nixon," went on Ned, laughing as he gazed down the road where the bully and his crony could still be seen trundling his barrow of dirt. "I'd like to be at the jewelry store when Noddy hears that what he has isn't worth a hill of beans," added Ned. "For of course he's going to have it assayed. Let's go watch him."

Ned seemed as if about to start after Noddy, but Jerry, putting out a quick hand, pulled him back.

"No, you don't!" exclaimed the tall lad. "It might be some sport to see what a fuss Noddy'll put up when he finds out he's been fooled, but it

would only be a passing joke, and, if he saw us standing around, laughing at him, he'd get mad and raise a row. Now we don't want that. We haven't had a run-in with him in some time, and there's no use looking for trouble. Let's pass it."

"Besides," went on Bob, "we want to hear about the sixty nuggets of gold. There's more interest in listening to a yarn about real gold than in seeing Noddy get fooled over something that isn't gold; eh, Jerry?"

"Of course."

"Oh, well, if you're both against me, of course I'll have to give in," sighed Ned; "but I sure would like to see the look on Noddy's and Bill's faces when they hear that they've been stung. They don't realize it yet, for they were some distance off when the old gentleman explained about it being his watch that caused the lode of gold."

"That's right," put in Mr. Brill. "Curious how I got fooled myself that same way. But at least I knew it was gold, and I was so surprised at finding it in that place that I never stopped to look at the character of it."

"Me either," chimed in Jim Nestor. "But if you boys want to hear the story I guess Harvey is ready to tell it, and then, if you're agreeable, we'll start after the sixty nuggets of gold."

"Hurrray!" yelled Bob. "That's great! Off for the border and the golden West!"



## 34 THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE BORDER

"Hush!" exclaimed Jerry, placing his hand on his chum's arm.

"What's the matter?" asked the stout lad, looking around.

"Well, there's no use informing the whole town about what we may do," went on Jerry, in a low voice. "Besides——" He paused suddenly, and continued—"well, let's go in and talk it over."

"Say, there was some other reason why you stopped me," spoke Bob, as he and the tall lad dropped back of the others. "What was it, Jerry?"

"Well, I didn't want to mention it before the others, but, just as you spoke, I saw Sim Fletcher walking around the corner, and I'm almost sure he heard what we were talking about."

"Sim Fletcher—that chap who's been hanging around with Bill Berry lately?"

"That's the one."

"Well, I'm glad you stopped me, then, for I shouldn't want Sim to know any of our business any more than I would Bill Berry, or Noddy Nixon. But I guess it's all right so far; isn't it? I didn't let out much."

"Oh, no. I don't believe any harm was done," said Jerry, but, at the same time he looked closely in the direction where Sim Fletcher had been last seen.

"Well, boys," began Jim Nestor, when they were all once more seated in the parlor of Jerry's home, "I guess we can spin the yarn now without being interrupted by that fellow who talks like a phonograph going at full speed. Are you all ready?"

"We sure are!" exclaimed Ned.

"Well, then, in the first place," went on the Westerner, with a glance at Harvey Brill, who sat staring about the well-furnished room; "in the first place let me say that I left your mine in good hands. It's producing well, and the ore is just as high grade as ever. But I simply couldn't stay there after Harvey told me his story. So I engaged a friend of mine—Jake Masterford—to look after things while I was away—and I know Jake'll do it as well as I could. So you needn't worry about the mine."

"Oh, we aren't worrying," said Jerry. "Only it rather surprised us to see you here East, when we thought you were in Arizona."

"I don't blame you a bit," spoke Jim. "And I'll tell you how it happened. One afternoon, following a fine clean-up, and when I had the gold safely put away and was wondering what I'd have for supper, there come a cloud of dust up the trail, and I thinks to myself here's someone in a hurry. I unlimbered my shooting iron, having some notion it might be a raid, and I was just

## 36 THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE BORDER

going to call to the boys to get ready when I seen it was only one man. Then I knew it was all right, but I was sure some surprised when I recognized my old side partner, Harvey Brill, with whom I used to prospect years ago. I seen Harvey was some excited, and I was, too, when he told me his yarn.

"And here's where I relinquish the stage and spot light to him," went on the mine foreman; "them being the proper terms, as I understand 'em. Now, Harvey, spin your yarn."

"It won't take long," said the man who had brought the news of the sixty nuggets of gold. "To begin with, I'm a miner and prospector, and have been ever since I was able to handle a pick and shovel.

"I can't say that I ever had much luck until lately, and then I sure did strike it rich. I'd gone to Helena, Montana, with a party of other prospectors, and we got so low that we had to be grub-staked. Even that didn't pan out, and then I cut loose from the others and struck off to the northwest, in the mountains.

"I won't tell you all the trouble I had, nor what I suffered before I made my strike, as it hasn't much to do with the story. But one afternoon, when I was plumb discouraged, I happened to dig my pick in a certain place, and when I turned out a stone I saw the yellow gleam. I knew

it was gold at once, and I went at the spot like a dog after a rabbit.

"Again, to shorten things up, I kept on digging until I turned out just sixty nuggets of gold—some of good size, and some small, but the lot was easily worth twenty thousand dollars—maybe more."

"Twenty thousand dollars!" gasped Jerry.

"Whew!" echoed Bob and Ned.

"That's what," resumed the miner. "Sixty nuggets of almost pure gold I found."

"And where are they now?" asked Ned.

"That's the trouble, son," said the miner. "They're hid in a place that I don't know as we'll be able to get 'em out of or not."

"Why?" Jerry wanted to know.

"Because I hid em down in a deep valley, right on the border line between Montana and Canada. It's the hardest valley to get into and out of that I ever saw. There's only one trail that I know of, and when I came back on it, after hiding my wealth, a landslide started and I don't know as anyone will ever be able to get down into the valley again."

Bob murmured something that sounded like "airship."

"What's that?" cried Mr. Brill. "An airship? Well I never——"

"I told you these boys had an airship," in-

interrupted Jim Nestor. "If that valley's on top of the ground they can get to it. But go on, let that part go for now. Tell 'em the rest of the story, and why you hid the gold."

"I'll shorten it a bit," resumed the prospector. "As soon as I had my nuggets, I found out that I was being watched and trailed by some of the grubstakers I had cut loose from. They were after me, and as they were desperate men I realized that they would rob me if I started away with the nuggets. That's why I hid my gold."

"But why couldn't you get a posse—have the sheriff and some of his deputies protect you?" asked Jerry, who thought the man's explanation a bit queer.

"Well, son, I s'pose I could have done that," said Mr. Brill, slowly; "but I tell you—I'm a peculiar man, and for some years back a host of poor relations have been depending on me to support 'em. I'm about tired of it, and now that I have struck it rich, if they heard about it, I'd never have any peace. They'd all want to come and live with me, and my sixty nuggets wouldn't last long with that crowd. So that's why I don't want much of a fuss when I go to claim 'em. I want to dig 'em up nice and quiet like, and enjoy my wealth myself."

"I don't blame you," said Jim.

"But couldn't you have waited until these grubstakers had gotten out of the way, and then dug

up your gold, and got away with it?" asked Bob.

"Son, you don't know those fellows!" exclaimed the miner. "They'll hang around that locality for more'n a year waiting for me to come back and give 'em a clew. It won't do. They're too sharp. I had to come away without the nuggets, and now we've got to fool 'em, and get that gold when they don't know it. Besides, it's going to be some job to get into that valley I reckon, even with an airship, though I never saw one of the contraptions."

"I guess we can manage that part of it," said Jerry with a smile, as he thought of their fine craft of the clouds. "But what happened when you found you were in danger of being robbed?"

"What happened? Why, I made up my mind I needed help, and I at once set out to hike it to my friend Jim Nestor. I knew where he was, having had a letter from him. I knew he could advise me. So I left the sixty nuggets of gold hidden near the border, and went for him. Then he——"

"I'll tell the rest," interrupted Jim, with a grin. "As soon as I heard Harvey's story," the foreman resumed; "I thought of you motor boys at once. 'They're the chaps for us,' I said. 'Let's go East,' and East we came and here we are. Now do you boys want to have a try for it?"

"Do we?" cried the three in a chorus, while Jerry added: "We sure do!"

"That's what!" cried Ned and Bob.

"But do you think you can find this valley again?" asked Jerry.

"I'm sure I can," said Mr. Brill. "It isn't easy to locate, but there's one curious thing about it that I never saw anywhere else, and that is there are a curious kind of luminous snakes in it—snakes that shine at night. I never——"

"What's that?" suddenly interrupted a voice at the parlor door. "Luminous snakes? Snakes that glow with phosphorus? Do you mean that? Oh, my dear man, let me ask you to be careful! Do not, I beg you, do not disappoint me! Luminous snakes! Oh, is the ambition of my life to be realized?" and there rushed into the room a little man, with a very bald head, and a pair of very large spectacles over his bright eyes. He strode up to Mr. Brill, and grasped him by the arm.

"Say that again!" the little man implored. "Tell me about the luminous snakes!"

"Wha—what—who are you?" asked the miner, shrinking back as though he feared a lunatic had attacked him.

"Professor Snodgrass!" exclaimed Jerry. "We might know he'd be on hand when a new kind of bug or reptile was mentioned!"

## CHAPTER V

### NODDY NIXON THREATENS

PROFESSOR SNODGRASS continued to gaze steadfastly at the astonished miner, still keeping hold of his coat. Then over the face of the little bald-headed scientist there came a change. Into his eyes there shot a gleam of joy.

"Stand still!" he commanded, though Mr. Brill was too much startled to do anything in the line of motion. "Don't stir!" went on the professor. "I'll have him in a minute. It's on your neck! Oh, if only it doesn't hop off! Easy now! There! I have it!" and with a quick motion he removed some insect from the coat collar of the miner. The latter moved quickly back and seemed about to bolt from the room.

"Wha—what am I up against?" he asked. "Is he crazy—or am I? What is he after, anyhow? Have I got bugs on me?"

"You did have, my dear man," said the professor, calmly, as he took out a small box, with a glass top, under which he imprisoned his prize.



"You were carrying about with you a very rare specimen of a jumping fly—something I have been hoping to capture for years. Now I have the little beauty. Oh, you can't get away!" he added, as the insect leaped against the glass. "I have you safe."

"Is—er—am I—what's it all about, anyhow?" cried the miner, looking from one to the other.

"It's all right, Harvey—it's all right," said Jim Nestor soothingly, for he knew the professor of old. "Mr. Snodgrass collects bugs and things for scientific purposes. He just found one on you, that's all."

"A jumping fly—*excilio muscarium*—it might be Latinized," explained the scientist. "A very rare specimen. I am exceedingly obliged to you."

"Oh—Oh, you—you're welcome," stammered Mr. Brill. "I hope I haven't any more things on me," and he looked himself over as well as he could.

"No more," said the professor, aiding in the search. "I wish you had. But what is this I heard about the luminous snakes?" he asked. "Snakes that shine at night—*illustris serpens* as they could be called. Many years have I longed to get such a specimen, and now, unexpectedly, I get on the track.

"I might explain," he went on, turning to the

boys, "that I have been sent out by a Boston museum to look for a new kind of blue lizard, but I can combine my search for that with the luminous snakes—the latter being much more valuable. I came to Cresville, thinking perhaps you boys might be going off on some expedition, as you frequently are, and I proposed to join you to look for the blue lizard. I came directly to your house, Jerry, since your mother has been so kind as to give me a standing invitation, and, just as I enter I hear—'luminous snakes!' Oh, how I rejoiced! This has indeed been a fortunate day for me!" and he looked at the jumping fly in his little box.

Mr. Brill was less excited now, since Jim Nestor had, in a whisper, explained more about the talented and kind professor, whose only hobby was bugs and reptiles.

"Tell me more about the snakes," urged the scientist.

"They were only casually mentioned," said Jerry, and briefly he related what is already known to my readers about the visit East of the two Westerners, and the curious train of events that had followed.

"And are you going after the sixty nuggets of gold?" asked the professor, eagerly.

"We hope to," spoke Bob, while the chums nodded.

## 44 THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE BORDER

"Then may I go along to look for the luminous serpents?"

"Of course!" exclaimed Jerry. "But we'll have to put this up to the folks," he added to his chums. "I hope my mother will let us go, and——"

"Oh, I'm sure my folks won't object," said Bob, while Ned nodded to show that he, too, thought he could easily gain the necessary consent.

"Then the thing to do is to tell them about it," went on Jerry. "Professor, you know where your room is—the same one you always have. Jim, I'm going to put you and Mr. Brill up here, and maybe——"

"We were calculating on going to a hotel," said the mine foreman. "We're not exactly used to plush carpets on the floor, and all that sort of thing."

"Oh shucks!" exclaimed Jerry. "You'll stay here. Besides, I think the hotel is overcrowded, anyhow. We've got lots of room. I'll bring mother in and introduce you to her, and then we'll leave you for a while. Dinner will soon be ready."

"Dinner!" exclaimed Mr. Brill. "Why it's long past noon. Besides we had a snack on the train—me and Jim."

"We call supper dinner here," explained Jerry,

with a laugh. "There's no sense in it, as far as I can see, but we always have dinner at night."

"And breakfast at noon?" asked Mr. Brill.

"No, that goes by its regular name, but the noon meal is lunch, here in the East."

"I don't care what they call 'em, as long as there's something to eat," said Bob, with a sigh, at which they all laughed.

Mrs. Hopkins came in, and soon made the two miners feel at home. They were shown to their rooms, and the professor to his.

"Well, Jerry, what is it this time?" asked his mother, with a smile.

"Sixty nuggets of gold, and some luminous snakes!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, what boys!" cried Mrs. Hopkins. "There, I'm not going to listen to a thing about it now. I've got to see about dinner."

"Then we'll talk it over at the table," proposed Jerry, as his mother hurried away to look to the comfort of her unexpected guests. "For we're bound to go."

"That's right," exclaimed Bob.

"Now, fellows, I'll tell you what we'll do," suggested Jerry. "We'll go to the station and get the baggage of the two miners, and then it will be nearly dinner time. My! how this day has passed! Come on, we'll run down in the car."

As they were about to enter it there was a

rush of feet down the street, and a shrill voice burst out with:

"You'd better look out—he's awful mad—says he's going to fix you—blow up the place—have you arrested—sent to jail—he's raving—completely fooled—you'll soon see him—Oh my! wow!"

"What's the matter now, Andy?" asked Jerry, turning to see the little chap panting from a run, and from his flow of words. "Is it a mad dog, or a runaway horse?"

"It's Noddy Nixon!" gasped Andy. "He—he——" but words failed him, and he could only make motions with his lips.

"Oh, Noddy!" exclaimed Jerry. "Here, Andy, hop in and we'll see if we can't catch your breath for you," and he cranked the car while the others took their seats.

They had not progressed far down the street before, near the jewelry store toward which he had gone, they saw Noddy Nixon. Beside him was Bill Berry, wheeling a barrow load of dirt, and the looks on the faces of the two showed anger and disappointment.

"Slow up, Jerry," said Ned, in a low voice, and the tall lad did so.

Noddy Nixon, catching sight of them, said something to Bill, who stopped. Then the bully, shaking his fist at the three chums, exclaimed:

"I'll fix you for this, all right!"

"Fix us for what?" asked Jerry, innocently.

"For playing that trick on me. You knew there wasn't any gold there, but you pretended there was, and I dug up a whole lot of worthless dirt. Bah! I'll fix you for it!"

"Wasn't there any gold in your dirt, Noddy?" asked Ned, smiling.

"No, and you know there wasn't!" snapped the bully. "You made me and Bill do a lot of work for nothing. But I'll get square with you, and those two men. I know Jim Nestor—I'll fix you!"

"Look here!" cried Jerry, not willing to take any more abuse. "We had no more to do with your digging up the railroad track than the man in the moon. You fooled yourself. There was gold on the track, but it came from a watch that was run over. We didn't know it until a little while ago. If you're so foolish as to cart off cinders, and think they're gold, that's not our fault."

"That's all right! I'll fix you!" growled Noddy. "Go on, Bill. I don't want to talk to 'em, but I'll get square, somehow!"

"Be careful it isn't in the same way when you took the *Comet*—our airship—and had to walk home," warned Ned, referring to something that had happened when the motor boys went after a

## 48 THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE BORDER

fortune of radium in the Grand Canyon. Noddy and his cronies had overreached themselves that time; but even then, Jerry and his chums had saved the bully from the hut on Snake Island.

"That's all right—I'll fix you!" threatened Noddy. "Come on, Bill."

"What'll you take for that load of dirt?" taunted Bob, but Noddy did not answer.

"Better let him alone," advised Jerry, as he started the auto again.

"Think he'll make trouble?" asked Ned.

"Oh, he might try."

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Andy Rush. "He was fooled all right. I was at the jewelry store when he took the dirt in. He said it was full of gold, and he asked the clerk how much he'd give for it. 'Get out of here with that trash!' the clerk yelled, and when Noddy spilled a lot of it on the floor, and on a lady's dress, Mr. Smith, the proprietor, was so mad that he shoved Noddy and Bill out. Then Noddy fairly raved and I ran to tell you. I thought he might do you some harm."

"Much obliged," said Jerry, to the little chap. "I guess we can handle Noddy," and yet Jerry felt a vague uneasiness as he thought of the sixty nuggets of gold, and recalled that Sim Fletcher might have overheard something about them.

## CHAPTER VI

### FORMING THE SYNDICATE

"WELL, I guess they'll come to a decision to-day," remarked Bob Baker, as he tilted back in his chair, and looked across at his two chums, Ned and Jerry.

"I'm sure I hope so," said Jerry. "For if we go after that gold we'll want some time to prepare, and get the airship in shape."

"Are you going in the *Comet*?" asked Ned.

"No—at least not all the way there. That's as far as I figured out. Of course we could make the whole trip in her if we wanted to, but I thought it would be better to ship her to—say Kabspell, put her together there, and then all get in and have a try for the valley of gold."

"That wouldn't be a bad scheme," agreed Bob. "We could travel by railroad, I suppose, and if they have dining cars on the train——"

"Oh, you and your dining cars!" cried Ned. "Wouldn't you get enough to eat if we took the airship?"

"Well, I might, but I have to do most of the



cooking, and then, it's rather cramped. You can't really enjoy a full meal on board."

"And Bob always wants a full meal," laughed Jerry.

It was several days after the arrival of the miners, and the time had passed quickly. The chums had assembled at Bob's house to talk matters over, and, in fact, they had talked about little else than the sixty nuggets of gold ever since hearing of them.

Jim Nestor and Harvey Brill had been made comfortable at the Hopkins home, as had Professor Snodgrass. The latter at once began roving about, as he always did, looking for new and strange insects, while the two Westerners went about town, Jim to call on some friends he had made during a previous visit.

"Yes, we've put it up to the folks now, as to whether we can go or not," went on Ned.

"And they promised to have an answer for us to-night," added Jerry.

"But I wonder why they wanted to have a conference with Jim and his friend again?" inquired Bob. "That's twice they've held secret meetings when they didn't let us in. Can it be that this thing isn't going to pan out?" It was a fact that, following the information given them by their sons, Mrs. Hopkins, Mr. Slade and Mr. Baker had been in frequent communication,

and had been closeted with the two Westerners.

"Oh, I guess it's all right," said Jerry. "There's no fake about Harvey Brill; anyone could tell that. And as for Jim Nestor, we all know him. But I guess the folks think it's a bit dangerous, on account of those plotting grub-stakers, and they want to see if there isn't some safer way to get the gold."

"Well, I hope they let us go," spoke Bob, with a sigh. "I always get such a good appetite when I travel!"

"Hit him, Ned!" begged Jerry; but the stout lad quickly got out of reach.

"We'll soon know," remarked Jerry, after a bit. "Let's go down to the river, and look over the motor boat. I promised Jim and his friend a ride in it, and we've got time before dinner."

"All right," agreed his chums; and soon they were tinkering at the motor, which needed some slight adjustments.

"I say though," questioned Bob, as he paused with a bit of oily waste in his hand; "if we do go, what about school? The term doesn't end for three or four weeks."

"Oh, we can easily cut it, and make it up in the Fall," said Ned, quickly. "Besides, if we want to, we can get Professor Snodgrass to coach us."

"Not if he gets on the trail of the luminous

snakes," declared Jerry, with a laugh. "He'll want to hunt for them all the while, for Mr. Brill said he didn't see very many—just a few in the valley—and they may take all the professor's time."

"Well, we can take a chance," said Ned. "Say, Bob, wipe that smudge off your nose."

"I will. Thanks! There's one on your ear."

"I guess we can clean up," announced Jerry. "She'll do."

They returned to Bob's house, and a little later the whole party, including Mrs. Hopkins, Mr. Slade, Mr. Baker, and the two Westerners, were gathered about the table.

"I guess we can go, all right," whispered Ned. "Dad looks as though he'd consented."

"I hope so," answered Jerry, for the grown folk had been in conference with the miners just prior to the announcement of the meal.

"Well, boys," said Mr. Slade, after a pause, "I don't see the necessity of keeping you in suspense any longer. We have decided that——"

"Can we go?" burst out Ned.

"Wait a bit, son," advised his father. "There are one or two matters to be explained. You did not hear, did you, that your friend Mr. Brill expects to buy a valuable piece of mining property near the one you are interested in, out in Arizona?"



"CAN WE GO?" BURST OUT NED.

*Motor Boys on the Border*

Page 53

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"No, he didn't tell us," said Jerry.

"Well it's true," said the prospector. "I didn't mention it because I had so much else on my mind. But I got a chance to secure an option on a mine not far from yours. I can get it cheap, for the owners are getting discouraged about it, but Jim and I figured on a new way to handle the ore. But I'm afraid, unless I can locate my sixty nuggets of gold, that I'll have to let the proposition go."

"Why?" inquired Ned.

"Because I haven't the money to take it up. I paid out two hundred dollars—nearly all the money I had in the world except my sixty nuggets—for a mere chance to buy an option inside of a month.

"The option itself will cost me ten thousand dollars, and if I get that it means that I have the right, within another month, to buy the mine for forty thousand dollars. Now I can swing half of that, for my nuggets are easily worth twenty thousand."

"And I promised to take the other half interest," said Jim. "But just at present my money is all tied up, and so I can't advance Harvey the necessary ten thousand to get the option."

"And if I don't close, and take that option in a few days, I'll lose the mine," went on Mr.

Brill. "And I hate to do that for I know it will pay. I did think I could get to my nuggets in time, but now I see I can't, and so I guess the mine will have to go to somebody else."

"Unless you can raise the rest of the ten thousand dollars," put in Mr. Slade.

"Exactly," spoke the miner.

"Well," went on the department store proprietor, "we have talked the matter over," and he indicated Mrs. Hopkins, the rich widow, and Mr. Baker, the banker. "We have decided that it would be too bad to lose the mine, and we have also agreed that you boys may make the trip after the nuggets—but——"

"Hurrray!" yelled Bob, Ned and Jerry in a chorus.

"Wait!" exclaimed Mr. Slade, holding up his hand. "I'm not done yet. If we advance the necessary ten thousand dollars, as a syndicate of three, to secure the option, will you agree to reimburse us when you get the nuggets, and take possession of the mine?" he asked of Mr. Brill.

"I sure will!" cried the prospector. "I'll sign any kind of paper you like."

"And I will too!" declared Jim Nestor.

"Well, we thought you would," went on the merchant; "so I had a contract drawn up. We have investigated your story," he said to the prospector, "and think it is all right. We will

let the boys have a try at finding the hidden nuggets.

"But mind you!" he exclaimed, becoming serious, and looking at the three chums, "it's up to you boys now to find those nuggets, and keep 'em after you find 'em, or we'll lose the ten thousand dollars we advance. You've got to find that gold!"

"And we'll do it!" cried Jerry.

"We sure will!" exclaimed Bob.

"When can we start?" Ned wanted to know.

"Just as soon as the papers can be prepared," answered his father. "Remember this trip isn't all for fun. There are grave responsibilities attached to it, for, though the ten thousand dollars will be advanced by the three of us, still none of us wish to sustain a loss. So—find those sixty nuggets!" he finished, with a smile.

"Oh, we'll get 'em—if those other fellows haven't located 'em; and I don't believe they have," declared Mr. Brill.

"Well, boys," began Mr. Baker, "now that is settled I think we can——"

He was interrupted by a rush of feet on the porch, and a shrill voice cried out:

"Hey, Bob! Jerry! Ned! Come on! Noddy Nixon is running off in your motor boat!"



## CHAPTER VII

### A NIGHT CHASE

"WHO's that?" cried Jim Nestor.

"The rapid-fire chap!" exclaimed his partner.

"That's right—It's Andy Rush," declared Bob.

"Don't stop to talk, Chunky!" fairly shouted Jerry, giving his stout chum the nickname sometimes applied to him. "Get a move on! If Noddy Nixon is trying some more of his tricks we'll stop him short."

"That's what!" cried Jim Nestor.

"I'm with you," added Harvey Brill.

By this time Jerry had reached the hall and caught up his hat. His example was followed by his chums and the two Westerners. As for Mr. Baker and Mr. Slade they sat back helplessly in their chairs.

Mrs. Hopkins looked alarmed at first, and then with a resigned air said:

"Oh, well, there's no use worrying. Noddy and the boys are having one of their periodical outbreaks."

"That young scamp ought to be sent out of the country," declared Mr. Baker.

Meanwhile Jerry and his chums had reached the porch, where they found Andy Rush awaiting them.

"When did it happen?" demanded Bob.

"Did you see him?" inquired Ned.

"Where did he go with our boat?" came from Jerry.

"Up the river!" panted the small chap, still breathing hard from his running and shouting. "I happened to come past the dock—I saw someone down there—it was dark—couldn't make out who it was—thought it was you fellows—I yelled—wanted a ride—no answer—thought that was funny—ran down—just in time to see Noddy and Bill Berry start off—wow!"

"What did you do?" asked Ned.

"Told Noddy he'd better not take your boat—said I'd tell you."

"What did he say?" Bob asked.

"Just laughed and put on more power. Better hurry, if you want to catch him!"

"Of course we do!" asserted Ned; "but how can we if he has our boat, a good start and is heading up stream? We'd better tell the police——"

"Police nothing!" snapped Jerry Hopkins. "We'll attend to this case ourselves!"

"That's the way to talk!" exclaimed Mr. Nestor. "And when we get hold of that Noddy Nixon we'll make him walk Spanish!"

"But it's dark," objected Bob. "We can't see him, and besides, we have no other boat!"

"Come on!" cried Jerry shortly, as he raced toward the street. "Never mind the dark—we can get a lantern."

"But a boat?" asked Ned.

"Down at the club house!" said Jerry, tersely. "We'll borrow one of the craft—I guess they won't mind. We've got to get our boat!"

"I'm on!" yelled Ned, as he raced beside his chum and Andy Rush, Bob, being heavier, brought up the rear with the two men, who were not used to running. However, all made fair time.

Jerry led the way toward the river. The motor boys had their own private boathouse, where their craft, the *Dartaway*, was kept. This was not their original motor boat of that name, for their first boat had met an untimely fate in a wreck, as my old readers know. But the lads had kept the name, and had bestowed it on a much larger and finer boat which they now owned.

"What do you suppose he took our boat for?" asked Ned of Andy, as they raced on.

"Just to be mean," declared the small chap.

"His own was probably out of commission," put in Jerry. "It usually is, and I guess he wanted a ride, so he took ours."

"He may damage it," came from Ned.

"It would be just like him to," asserted Andy. "He doesn't care where he runs with a boat or an auto."

"No, nor an airship either," said Jerry. For Noddy, following the example of the motor boys, had managed to acquire a craft of the air, as well as one that skimmed over the water. He also owned an automobile.

"Think there'll be any boats at the club house?" asked Ned, as they neared the river.

"There usually are at this time in the evening," said Jerry. "We'll confiscate one if we have to."

During the past year the Cresville Athletic Club, to which our heroes belonged, had branched out into aquatics, and had built a fine boathouse on the river for the use of such of its members as had motor boats. As Jerry said, there were usually one or more such craft at the dock these Spring evenings.

It was now quite dark, for dinner, at which had been talked over the plan for getting the sixty nuggets of gold, had been somewhat protracted, and night had fallen when Andy Rush made his startling announcement.

## 60 THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE BORDER

"There are two boats!" cried Ned, as he and Jerry, in the lead, came in sight of the club house.

"Yes, one is Mr. Wakefield's *Iris*," said Jerry, who knew every boat in the club. "And the other is Mr. Wood's *Eel*."

"Which one'll you take?"

"The *Eel*, I guess. She's faster, though not so easy to handle. Pile in! Do you see anything of him?"

"Yes, there he is, just going up to the reading room," spoke Ned, for there was a separate building from the boathouse where the club members could read, or get a light lunch. "Shall I call to him?"

"No, just run up and explain things to him," suggested Jerry. "I'll be getting his boat in shape for the chase. I'll have to light the lamps and see if there's gas enough. Andy and Bob will help me. We'll be ready to start when you come back. I know Mr. Wood will let us take the *Eel*."

Ned raced off to catch the club member, and quickly explained what was wanted. Mr. Wood was an enthusiastic motorist, and had taken an interest in our heroes ever since they rode their first bicycle race under the club auspices, and had won motorcycles.

"Take my boat?" he cried. "Of course you may! She's full of gasoline and all ready for a

fast run. Go as far as you like! That Noddy Nixon again; eh? You fellows will have to teach him a lesson!"

"We have, but it doesn't seem to do much good," complained Ned, as he turned back to re-join Jerry, who was busy getting the *Eel* in shape for the pursuit.

By this time Mr. Nestor and his partner, together with Bob, had caught up with the others. Andy was helping Jerry light the port, starboard and stern lights, as well as the white one in the bow.

"What's up?" demanded Mr. Nestor.

"Going to start the stamp-mill going?" asked his friend.

"We're going to catch the fellow that has our boat!" explained Jerry. "Get aboard."

They got into the *Eel*, several club members coming down to the dock to learn the cause of the excitement.

"I hope you catch him!" exclaimed Mr. Wakefield, the club's athletic instructor. He had no love for Noddy Nixon.

With Jerry at the helm, Ned cranked up, spinning the flywheel over. At the first try the *Eel* responded, and, with a series of powerful explosions in the cylinders, started away from the dock. Jerry headed up stream, in the direction Andy said Noddy had gone.

"Though he may have turned around again and steered for the lake," said Ned. "Better go a bit slow, Jerry, until you get some trace of him."

"I will. I'll light the search lamp, too, and we may be able to pick him up when quite a way off. We'll stop at the next club house to inquire if he passed." For there was another boating association about five miles up the stream.

The search light sent out an intense white gleam over the dark waters of the river as the night chase was begun. The *Eel* glided ahead not unlike her namesake, and the motor boys, and their friends, with eager eyes, looked forward for the first glimpse of the bully who had their craft.

"This is some traveling!" exclaimed Jim Nestor admiringly, as the speed increased.

"It sure is," agreed his partner. "It beats a pack mule or a burro!"

"Wait until you ride in *our* boat," said Ned, with proper pride. "We'll take you on a little trip before we start for the border."

## CHAPTER VIII

### MAROONED

WITH Ned to attend to the engine, to see that it got the right amount of oil, and, occasionally, to adjust the carburetor, and Jerry at the wheel, guiding the craft, the *Eel* darted up the river. Every eye was on the alert to catch the first glimpse of the boat which they were pursuing.

"Think he can have gotten much ahead of you?" asked Mr. Nestor, after a pause.

"Well, he had quite a start," observed Ned.

"And our boat can go some, if she's handled rightly," added Jerry.

"The fastest on the river—in her class," added Bob, proudly. "But this is likely to be a long chase. I wish——"

Bob paused, but Ned, with a chuckle, said:

"I know what Chunky was thinking of."

"What?" asked the stout lad, defiantly.

"That we should have brought a lunch along! Am I right?"

"Well, if we're going to be out half the night we'll need it," declared Bob, in self-defense.



"We won't be out all night if we once get sight of Noddy," declared Jerry, with conviction. "As soon as he sees us after him he'll give in—he's that kind!"

The *Eel* was making good progress, and Jerry knew he could depend on Ned to get more speed out of her, when needed. But as yet they had seen no signs of their own boat.

On up the river they swept, the searchlight throwing out a brilliant gleam, and bringing into bold relief the trees and bushes along the shore. Bob had joined Jerry in the bow, while Ned was at the motor, and the two men and Andy Rush occupied one of the rear seats. Suddenly the stout lad uttered a cry:

"There's something dead ahead!" Those in the boat thrilled at his words, but a damper was soon put on their enthusiasm when Jerry said:

"False alarm. That's only a log of wood. It's a good thing you saw it, though, for we might have rammed it, and, going as fast as we are, we might have stove a hole in the hull. All right, Chunky!"

Once more there was silence, broken only by the chug of the motor, and the slight squeak as the steering rope passed over the pulleys and around the drum.

"There's the Riverview club house!" remarked Ned, in a low voice, as they made a turn

in the stream and saw a lighted building ahead of them.

"We'll stop there and inquire," decided Jerry, and a little later they tied up at the dock. As members of the Cresville club our heroes had visiting privileges at the other organization, and they were made welcome.

"No, we haven't seen anything of your boat," said several lads whom Jerry and his chums knew well. A number of the older members, who had been sitting on the dock enjoying their cigars, said the same thing, for the *Dartaway* was well known as one of the finest craft on the stream.

"Maybe he went down with the current," suggested Lloyd Berger, the president of the organization.

"If he did we've had this much of the chase for nothing," said Jerry, regretfully. "And yet——"

"Excuse me," put in one of the boatmen hired by the club, "but could it be that fellow who took your launch would be running without lights?"

"He might!" cried Ned, eagerly. "Why?"

"Because, a little while ago," said the man; "I saw some sort of a craft go up the river, away on the other side. She didn't show a gleam, and it was so dark that the only way I glimpsed

her was when she came in range with our signal lamp on the post," and he pointed to a lantern set to guide craft to the club float. "At first I thought it might be some fishermen in a big row-boat," the man went on; "for I didn't hear any motor, but when I got that view of her I saw it was built different from a small craft. Yet there wasn't any noise."

"The *Dartaway* runs as quietly as a sewing machine at some speeds," said Jerry. "If that was Noddy he must have slowed down purposely on passing here."

"And I'd be willing to put up a sugar cookie against a cent that it was him!" exclaimed Bob.

"Don't, Chunky, you might lose, and then you'd be hungry," laughed Ned. "But it does look suspicious."

"Come on then!" cried the tall lad. "We'll keep up stream for a while!"

Once again they were on their way, cutting through the black water, illuminated by the gleams of their lamps and the searchlight.

They had gone perhaps four miles above the Riverview club house when, as they shot around a bend in the stream, little Andy Rush, sitting beside Jerry, sprang up, grasped the arm of the steersman, and cried out:

"There he is! I see your boat! Go to it—catch him—ram him—run him down! Whoop!

See where the searchlight reflects on the stern of that boat!" and he pointed ahead.

Jerry, who was steering with one hand, and manipulating the searchlight with the other, swung the gleaming shaft of brilliancy so that it took in the craft ahead. Then he gave a shout of delight.

"That's our boat!" he yelled. "Now for the end of the chase! Give her all she'll stand, Ned!"

Immediately all was excitement aboard the *Eel*. Mr. Brill gave a whoop, which Jim Nestor echoed, and then the man who had hidden the sixty golden nuggets drew something from his pocket with a flourish, and asked:

"Shall I plug a hole in her below the water line, boys, and make him stop to bail?"

"Here! Put up that shooting iron!" cried Jim. "Where do you think you are—on the border, or down in Arizona? These Eastern folks don't do things that way!"

"More's the pity!" exclaimed the miner. "But I could plug him as easy as not," and he sighed regretfully, for the boat ahead offered a splendid mark.

"Yes, and you'd sink our craft if you did any 'plugging,'" said Jerry. "Never mind, we'll catch him, for he won't know how to get the best speed out of the *Dartaway*."

"There's no one in her!" cried Ned, as in response to the further supply of gasoline he fed to the motor, at the same time advancing her spark, the *Eel* crept up on the other boat. "They've abandoned her, Jerry!"

"No, she's being steered," declared the tall lad, who had observed that their craft kept on a straight course. "They're hiding down in the cockpit," he added. "They're afraid!"

"And they'd better be!" murmured Bob.

"They're drawing away from us," said Ned regretfully, after a few moments.

"Can you give us any more speed?" asked Jerry, in a low voice; for he, too, had noticed that their craft was increasing the distance between them.

"I'll try," answered Ned, and he once more adjusted the carburetor. The result was at once apparent, for the *Eel* shot ahead at increased speed.

"We're creeping up on them!" cried Andy, a minute later.

"No, they're slowing down!" exclaimed Jerry. "I thought so. They're monkeying with the motor, and they've got it adjusted wrong. We'll get to 'em now! Hold her so, Ned!"

Ned nodded without speaking, and the *Eel* kept up her fast motion. Now some commotion

could be noted aboard the *Dartaway*, and Jerry cried out:

"Hold on there, Noddy Nixon! Come back with that boat, if you know what's good for you!"

"Let's see you catch us!" fired back the bully, while Bill Berry added:

"We'll sink your craft if you don't keep back!"

"We're coming on!" declared Jerry, defiantly, not at all alarmed by the threat. It was evident that both Bill and Noddy were doing their best to get more speed out of the *Dartaway*, but without success. Had our heroes been aboard her, they could have done it, as they knew every bolt and lever. But the boat seemed to realize that she was in the hands of enemies, and refused to do her best.

Slowly the better-managed *Eel* crept up, until, when they came to a narrow stretch of the river, Andy Rush cried:

"They're going to run her ashore!"

"That's right!" added Bob, as in the gleam of the search light they saw their craft headed for the bank.

"They're giving up!" was Jerry's opinion, and so it proved. A little later the "chug-chug!" of the *Dartaway's* engine ceased. She swung up alongside a little point of land that jutted out

into the stream, two figures leaped out, splashed into the water and then, running along shore, vanished in the woods.

"There they go!" cried Jim Nestor.

"After 'em!" yelled his partner.

"Let 'em go," advised Jerry. "We've got out boat back. I want to see if they've damaged her."

But aside from tools and other things being scattered carelessly about the craft, no great harm had been done, which fact was soon ascertained as the *Eel* came alongside. The *Dartaway* had been rammed into a mud bank, however, and the *Eel* had to pull her off. Then, with Ned and Bob to run her, she was headed down stream and, convoyed by the *Eel* she soon came in sight of the club house where the lads had first stopped.

"Let's get out here," suggested Bob, as they neared the lighted dock.

"What for—to eat?" asked Ned.

"No—to telephone home that we're all right," said the stout lad quickly. "Of course," he added, "if they invite us to have lunch, it—er—well, it wouldn't be polite to refuse; would it?"

"Of course not, you old human refrigerator!" cried Ned, with a laugh. "Hi, Jerry!" he called. "Ten minutes for refreshments!"

Jerry, who was ahead with the *Dartaway*,

laughed and understood. They were soon in the club house again, being congratulated on their success. They were invited to have something to eat, much to Bob's delight, and they accepted, after telephoning home that the chase had ended successfully.

A little later they were under way again, and had tied their boat at their own boathouse, returning the *Eel* to Mr. Wood.

"And what became of Noddy?" asked that gentleman.

"He disappeared in the woods," said Jerry. "It'll be a long walk back, and it serves him right."

They could see no reason why the bully should want to take their boat, except to annoy them, though Jerry had a suspicion that Noddy intended to hide it somewhere to get even for the fancied injury concerning the false alarm about the gold. But they never learned definitely.

"Well, I guess we'll adjourn for the night," suggested Jerry, when they were back in Cresville, and found that their parents had gone to their several homes after the conference. At their own houses the boys were told that the matter of preparing the necessary papers about the mine would soon be under way, and then they could start for the border, to search for the hidden nuggets of gold.



"Well, how about a motor boat ride to-day?" asked Jerry, of his chums one afternoon, about a week later. "We promised Jim and his partner to show them what the *Dartaway* could do," he added.

"Then let's do it," suggested Ned. "We can take a good run up or down the river before dinner."

"Oh—yes—dinner!" put in Bob. Then he stopped suddenly. "But I'm willing. Only I say let's go down stream. There's a better view, and we were up the river the other night," he added.

So it was arranged, and soon the two Westerners were in the fine *Dartaway*, which was speeded to her limit down the river.

"This sure is some boat!" exclaimed Mr. Brill in admiration, as he looked at the little cabin, and at the various appointments.

"If we could only take it out West with us," sighed Ned. "But it's quite a job to pack it."

"And there isn't much water out where we're going," said the prospector. "Flathead Lake is about the biggest."

"Flathead!" exclaimed Bob. "Is that where the Flathead Indians are?"

"Well, it might have been named after them," admitted Mr. Brill. "Though I guess there aren't any Flatheads there now. But there are

some Blackfeet on their reservation, not so very far away."

"Blackfeet Indians! Whoop!" yelled Bob. "Say, we'll have some sport all right."

"Not with them," declared Jerry, decidedly. "This is no Wild West show we're going on. We're out for business—we've got to get those sixty nuggets."

"And it won't be any easy job—with those grub-stakers after 'em," murmured Harvey Brill.

"Keep still!" whispered Jim. "These boys are as game as they make 'em, but there's no use crossing a bridge before the cows come home, or whatever that motto is."

"All right," agreed the prospector. "I'm wise. But say—this is a pretty spot all right."

"We often camp on that island for a day or so," spoke Ned, pointing to a large one in the middle of the river, which, at this point was about three miles wide, but not very deep.

"If we had any grub along we could camp now," said Bob. "There's a shack there; and——"

He got no farther, for at that instant, with a sort of apologetic cough, the motor stopped and the boat began to drift toward the island.

"What's the matter?" asked Ned. "Run out of gasoline?"

"It can't be that," declared Jerry, with a

puzzled look. "I filled the tank before we started."

"Something's wrong," declared Bob.

"Evidently," agreed Jerry, as he began to go over the motor, while Ned steered the drifting boat toward the island.

Try as he might, Jerry could not get the engine started again, and they were forced to come to a stop at a small dock which the boys had made to accommodate their craft when they camped on the island. Then, as the afternoon waned, Jerry and his chums did everything they could think of to get going again, but it was of no use.

"We're marooned!" exclaimed Bob, gloomily, as he looked across to the mainland through the gathering shadows. "Marooned on the island, and not a bite to eat!"

## CHAPTER IX

### NODDY PACKS UP

"WHAT are we going to do about it?"

"Can we stay here all night?"

Thus Bob and Ned questioned Jerry, who stood silently regarding the stalled motor. The tall lad did not answer at once.

"Kinder balked on you; has she, son?" asked Mr. Brill, softly. He and Jim Nestor had, with the others, disembarked from the *Dartaway*.

"Sort of," admitted Jerry, with something like a frown on his face. "And I can't understand it."

"Does it often act up that way?" Jim Nestor wanted to know.

"Not very often," said Jerry. "We've got it adjusted pretty fine. I can't see what's the matter. There's a good spark, and there's gasoline in the carburetor, for I tested the drain cock. Yet there doesn't seem to be an explosion."

Once more he threw in the switch, and turned the flywheel. There was a buzz as the coil

vibrated, showing that the electrical connections were good, but no explosion followed.

"Ned, you try," suggested Jerry. "Maybe I'm the hoodoo."

Ned stepped in front of the motor. But, before he attempted to turn the flywheel he gravely tied a knot in his watch chain.

"What's that for?" asked Jim Nestor. "Afraid you'll break the links?"

"No, it's to break the hoodoo," answered Ned. "You know there are so many things that can happen to a gasoline motor that no one can number them. Lots of times a little thing like sprinkling talcum powder on the cylinder head, or giving the timer a gum drop, will make her start when nothing else will. I'm just trying the watch chain as an experiment," and he grinned broadly.

But it was of no avail, and the more Ned labored at turning over the flywheel, the more the motor seemed to balk.

"I give up!" exclaimed the merchant's son. "It's your turn, Bob."

The stout lad gravely took out a bit of court plaster, and pasted it on the magnet of the dynamo.

"What's that for?" asked Mr. Brill, quickly.

"That's my way of breaking a hoodoo," said Bob.

But that, likewise, was of no avail, and the engine remained "dead."

Jerry tried again, with no success, and then they all sat down on the shore and looked goomily at the boat. It was getting late, no other craft was in sight, and the river at that point was too wide to admit of signalling, or calling to shore.

"I guess it's us for an all-night stay," remarked Bob, gloomily. "And not a bit of grub!"

"There would have been some in the box in the shack if you hadn't insisted on eating the last box of sardines," declared Ned, for often the boys would spend a day or two camping out on the island, and they had a small supply of provisions there.

"Well, I was hungry," said the fat youth. "I had to eat 'em."

"And you're hungry now," said Jerry.

"If we've got to stay here let's go up to the cabin, and see what we can do about sleeping," proposed Ned. "It's pretty evident that we can't get the motor going now. There must be something wrong with the valves. It'll have to be taken apart. Let's go to the shack."

They found the cabin in good shape, and all of them could sleep there, since it was not cold, and there were enough covers on the bunks. But there was no food.

"Well, we'll have to make the best of it," declared Jerry. "Let's go back to the boat, and see that everything's safe for the night, and then we'll turn in."

But they were spared the discomforts of a foodless night on the island. For, when they were making their craft snug at the improvised dock, Ned caught the sound of oars on the dark river.

"There's a boat!" he exclaimed. "Let's yell!"

"Good idea," agreed Jerry, and they raised their voices.

"What you want?" came the answering hail, as the sound of rowing ceased.

"We're stuck on the island," answered Ned. "We want to be taken ashore. Who are you?"

"Sud Snuffles," was the answer, and the boys at once recognized the voice of a queer character about town—a man whom they often hired to do odd tasks. Sud was a person very fond of going about, and he had the faculty of getting into trouble, and out again, with ease. Just now he was a welcome friend.

"Take us ashore, Sud," called Jerry. "Our boat has gone back on us."

"Quarter apiece!" exclaimed the practical Sud. "Can't do it for any less. I'm fishin' and

if I stop to ferry you folks over I may miss a nice mess. Quarter apiece!"

"That's a go!" cried Jerry, glad of the chance to get to the mainland. "We'll leave our boat here and come for it to-morrow. I'm sorry," he said to the two Westerners, "that we couldn't give you a better trip."

"Oh, that's all right," spoke Jim, with a broad grin.

"Wait until you get in our airship," suggested Ned. "When we swoop above the clouds——"

"I s'pose then, when anything happens, you just rest on a cloud bank until it's fixed," said the miner, grimly.

"Well, we don't fall, at any rate!" exclaimed Jerry.

Sud rowed up, and soon had them all in his boat. It was rather crowded, but he got them safely ashore, and collected his fee.

The boys lost no time seeking their homes, and Bob was in such a hurry that he left his companions far behind.

"Myl he must be hungry!" laughed Ned.

The next day, in a rowboat, they went for their disabled craft. Once more Jerry and his chums tried to start it, but without success, and they had to tow it back.

At their home dock they went carefully over it. While they were at it Professor Snodgrass,



## 80 THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE BORDER

who had not been much in the company of the chums of late, came up.

"When do we start for the place of the luminous snakes, boys?" he wanted to know.

"Soon," answered Jerry. "We are just as anxious as you are," and he reached for a monkey wrench on a locker beside him.

"Hold on!" cried the scientist. "Don't touch that!"

"What's the matter?" asked Jerry. "Is it too hot, from having been in the sun?"

"No, my lad, but on the handle is one of the rarest dragon flies I have ever seen. Don't move, any of you, and I'll have him in a second. Oh, the beauty!" and the professor, from one of his many pockets, pulled out a small insect net. Carefully getting into the boat, he poised the net above the dragon fly on the wrench handle. There was a swoop, an excited exclamation, and the next moment the professor had leaped out on the dock and was racing along the river bank, crying:

"He got away! Oh, the little beauty! He escaped me, but I'll get him yet!" and away he raced after the specimen.

"He's good for all day," murmured Jerry, as he took up the wrench.

"What are you going to do?" asked Bob.

"Take off the gasoline pipe. There must be some stoppage in it. No more gasoline drips

from the carburetor, as it did at first, so there must be something in the pipe."

It did not take long to remove the connections. Jerry probed a bit at the gasoline tank outlet and then, as a sudden flow of the fluid came, he cried:

"There it is! A bit of waste right where the pipe fits on the tank. There's been some trick here!"

"Noddy Nixon!" exclaimed Ned.

"I shouldn't wonder a bit. The night he took our boat he must have unscrewed the gasoline tank cover and dropped a bit of waste in. It took until now to float down into the opening, and no wonder we couldn't start the motor with no gas in her. There must be something wrong with the carburetor, too, or she'd have run on what was in that. I'll look."

He found that the carburetor had been so tampered with that, while there was gasoline in the base of it there was none that could be drawn into the cylinder chambers. With the removal of the waste, and the adjusting of the carburetor, the motor started off at the first turn of the fly-wheel.

"Hurray!" cried Ned. "Now we're all right. We'll give Jim and Harvey another ride before we start for Montana and the sixty nuggets of gold! Ugh!" he suddenly grunted, as

Jerry nudged him in the ribs. "What's that for?"

"Didn't you see Bill Berry passing just as you said that, Bob?" demanded the tall youth.

"No, I didn't!"

"Well, he just sneaked past, and I'm sure he heard you. We've got to be careful."

"Oh, I guess he and Noddy won't bother us any more."

"I'm sure I hope not, but I'd just as soon they didn't know anything of our affairs. I'm going to do one thing, though."

"What's that?"

"I'm going to see Noddy, and give him one piece of my mind! The idea of putting our boat out of commission that way! I've a good notion to make a complaint of malicious mischief against him."

"It would serve him right if you did."

"I'll think about it," said Jerry.

The *Dartaway* was soon in running order, and the boys gave the two Westerners a fine ride down the river. That afternoon, on returning to their boathouse, and recalling what trouble they had had the night before, Jerry determined to make a formal complaint against the bully.

"We've stood enough from him!" he exclaimed. "It's time he found out he can't do as he pleases!"

"That's right!" agreed his chums, and Jerry, having secured the boat, started for the office of the family lawyer, to make a formal complaint against Noddy.

As he was about to enter he saw Andy Rush hurrying along.

"He looks as if he had some news," mused the tall lad. "Hello, Andy!" he greeted. "What's up?"

"Didn't you hear?" asked Andy.

"No, what is it?"

"Noddy Nixon packed up to-day, and he and Bill Berry left town in a hurry."

"They did?" cried Jerry. "I wonder if he heard about the complaint I was going to make against him."

"I don't know," answered Andy. "But I happened to be down at the station when he and Bill took the train. And their baggage was checked for some place in Montana."

"Montana!" cried Jerry. "Are you sure of this, Andy?"

"Of course I am!" exclaimed the small chap.

"Then he's heard something about the sixty nuggets of gold!" murmured Jerry. "He's going to have a try for them. We've got to get ahead of him!"

## CHAPTER X

### AN AIRSHIP FLIGHT

"WELL, there's no use going in now," said Jerry, after a pause.

"Going in where?" asked Andy Rush.

"To consult our lawyer. I was going to see about making a complaint against Noddy. But what's the use, if he's skipped out?"

"Maybe he heard what you were going to do," suggested the small chap.

"No," answered the tall lad, "I didn't tell anyone, except Ned and Bob. I guess Noddy left because—well, because he wanted to," he concluded quickly, for Andy Rush did not know of the prospective journey of the motor boys. In fact, their intention to seek for the gold was kept as quiet as possible, for they realized how such rumors spread.

So, as a matter of fact, only the boys, the two Westerners, and the parents of our heroes, knew of the proposed trip.

"That is unless Noddy has overheard something, and suspects," murmured Jerry, as he turned back toward home. "And it looks as if

he had from the way he hurried off. And to Montana, too! What part of Montana was his baggage checked to?" he asked, of Andy.

"I couldn't make out the tags very well, but the last part of the name was 'Spell,' " spoke the excitable youth.

"Spell—spell," murmured Jerry. "I have it—the town of Kabspell—it's near Flathead Lake, and we were counting on sending our airship there to make the start! Noddy has gotten on to our plans somehow!"

"What's that?" asked Andy, quickly, for Jerry was half talking to himself.

"Oh—nothing. I was just wondering what Noddy would do, that's all. Much obliged for telling me. Here's a quarter, Andy. Get yourself a soda."

"Thanks! I will," and Andy, forgetting Jerry's rather strange and worried actions, in the prospective delights of a soda, hurried off.

"We've got to get busy," decided the tall lad, as he made his way home. Quickly he called up his chums by telephone, and when they were assembled at his house, with Mr. Nestor and Mr. Brill in attendance, while Professor Snodgrass hovered in the background, Jerry told them the news.

"That means we've got to get started right away," decided Ned.

"That's it," agreed Jim Nestor. "I know Noddy Nixon of old, and while he may not know just where the nuggets are hidden, he's got just luck enough to stumble on the trail of some of those grub-stakers, who have a general idea. We'd better get off as soon as we can."

"The sooner the better, I say," put in Professor Snodgrass. "I've caught about all the rare insects there are in these parts, and I do want to get some of those luminous snakes. Can we start to-morrow?"

"Hardly," said Jerry, with a smile. "If we're going to take the airship we'll have to give it a trial, and then take it apart for shipment. That will take some time. But in a week I think we could be on the move."

"If you have fully decided to go," said Mrs. Hopkins, who just then entered the room; "and I suppose that you have, there is no use in delaying, Jerry. Really, I am a little worried about the dangers of the trip, but since we have invested our money in it, I would rather you than that Nixon boy get the gold nuggets."

"That's what, momsey!" cried Jerry, kissing her, at which she laughed, for mother and son were great "chums."

"Then trot out the airship and let's give her a trial!" exclaimed Harvey Brill. "I've never ridden in one of the shebangs, but I'll take a

chance in one. The papers are all fixed up now, I have telegraphed the money to take up the option on the mine, and all that's to be done is to go get the hidden nuggets."

"And the snakes—don't forget them," put in the scientist, eagerly watching a fly on the wall, as if hoping it would prove to be a rare variety.

"All right," agreed Jerry. "There's just one point to be thought of though, and when the professor mentioned snakes it occurred to me. Now we don't want to start off and arrive on the border as a party of prospectors looking for gold nuggets. If we do, we'll have a trail of men after us who are always on the lookout to take advantage of news of a rich strike. And, too, if the grub-stakers are still on the watch, they'll hear about us and make trouble."

"What can we do, though?" asked Bob.

"Pretend that we're a party of scientists out for rare specimens of various kinds. In effect Professor Snodgrass will be the head of the scientific expedition, and we will be his assistants. How is that?"

"Fine!" cried Ned.

"That ought to fool 'em," said Bob.

"I think it will be just the thing," came from Jim Nestor. "As you say, Jerry, we want to keep this thing as quiet as possible. So, Pro-



## 88 THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE BORDER

fessor, you can regard us as members of your luminous-snake-hunting expedition."

"I am agreeable," spoke the scientist, with a smile. "And I hope we are successful."

The motorship, *Comet*, was floated out of the big shed for a trial flight the next day. Harvey Brill was the only one of the party who had not seen it, and his astonishment was a sight to behold. At first he could scarcely believe that it would mount into the air, for the *Comet* was of large size.

"Oh, she'll go up," said Jerry; "and you'll go with her."

"I'm game!" exclaimed the miner, grimly.

As I have already described the motorship in previous books of this series I will not go into details now. Sufficient to say that the *Comet* was a combined aeroplane and dirigible balloon. It had also a hydroplane attachment, enabling it to float on water, and skim over its surface.

There was a powerful motor aboard, that whirled the propellers, causing the ship to advance. This feature could be used when the craft was an aeroplane or dirigible. When it was desired to progress as the latter style of craft the bag could be inflated with a powerful gas, generated aboard the *Comet*.

There was an engine room, a pilot house, sleeping and eating quarters, and a large living

room. Provisions for many days could be carried aboard, and the kitchen was the delight of Bob's heart. He spent much of his time there when on a trip, concocting new and dainty dishes.

In fact the *Comet* was a veritable motorship of the air, as much so as a yacht would be on some lake or ocean. In it the boys had traveled many thousands of miles, and had visited places which would have been inaccessible but for their unique craft, much of which they had built themselves, with the help of a veteran balloonist.

"Well, get aboard!" called Jerry, when he had seen that everything was in readiness. The professor took his place with as much unconcern as if he was going for an auto ride. He had an insect net with him, for he often got curious creatures of the upper air on these trips. Jim Nestor had often ridden in the *Comet*, and of course to Bob and Ned it was an old story. But Mr. Brill hesitated about getting into the cabin.

"Are you sure she won't bust and come down with us?" he asked, nervously.

"Sure," answered Jerry, with a laugh. "Get aboard," and the mining prospector did so, but with evident reluctance.

"Let her go!" cried Jerry to Ned, who was in the engine room, with Bob, while the tall lad held the steering wheel. The big propellers whizzed around, the motorship quivered from end to end,

and then began to shoot across the ground on the starting wheels.

"Gee whizz! We're moving!" cried Harvey Brill.

Jerry yanked back on the lever that adjusted the elevation rudder. The nose of the *Comet* was pointed upward and she shot into the air on a slant.

"We're going up!" yelled the astonished and almost delighted Mr. Brill.

"I told you we would," asserted his partner, as if it was an every-day occurrence with him.

Rapidly the craft soared upward, and in a few minutes it was floating several hundred feet above the town of Cresville. Higher and higher it mounted.

"How's she running, Ned?" asked Jerry, from the pilot house.

"Fine. The motor's going like a sewing machine. Is she steering all right?"

"Couldn't be better. I guess she'll do."

"And it's this shebang you're going to ship out West to go down into the valley where I've hidden my nuggets?" asked the prospector.

"This is it," answered Jerry. "If you'll come up here I'll show you how I control her," and when Mr. Brill entered the pilot house Jerry pointed out the various levers and wheels.

"What's this one for?" asked the Westerner,

as he touched a small lever. Quite by accident he moved it a trifle. Instantly there was a snapping and crackling sound in the motor room, and the *Comet* gave a sickening lurch.

"We're falling!" cried Mr. Brill. "We're going down! I know! I fell in an elevator once! We're falling down!" and he jumped back in terror, and sought to climb out of the window of the pilot house.

## CHAPTER XI

### OFF FOR THE BORDER

"HERE! Come back!" yelled Jerry, making a grab for the Westerner. "Don't jump!"

"But we're falling! I'm not going to stay in here and be killed!"

"You'll be killed **sure** if you jump. But there's no danger!"

"No danger? And we falling down about a mile? No danger?" Mr. Brill was greatly excited.

"Not a bit," said Jerry, with a smile. "You pulled the emergency lever, that stopped the motor suddenly, but I'll start the gas machine, and we'll float like a balloon until the motor gets to working again."

The Westerner seemed doubtful, and there was even a worried look on the face of Jim Nestor. For, though he trusted fully to the boys, he could not recall ever having had an experience like this before.

And, undoubtedly, the *Comet* was falling earthward at great speed. But a look at the

three boys—showing them calm and collected—and another glance at Professor Snogdrass, who was eagerly scanning the air for a sight of some rare insect, rather put the Westerners more at their ease.

“Are you sure there’s no danger?” asked Mr. Brill, as he made his way back into the pilot house.

“Not a bit,” answered Jerry. “You see we are not falling as rapidly as we were,” and he indicated a dial on the side wall, the hand of which registered the height. It had moved rapidly over the clock-face, but now was going more slowly.

“I haven’t started the gas machine yet,” went on the young pilot; “but I threw up the head planes, and so checked the descent, just as a bird-man volplanes to earth with his motor shut off. Now I’ll start the gas generator, and we’ll become a dirigible balloon for a change. Let her go, Ned!”

Ned, with Bob’s aid, swung over the handle that set the gas generating machine in operation, and, with a hiss, the powerful vapor began to fill the big bag. In a few minutes all downward motion was checked, and the *Comet* floated in the air—a balloon.

“Well I’ll be grub-staked!” exclaimed Mr. Brill. “That was clever, all right.”

"It sure was," agreed his partner.

But Jerry had not finished testing the *Comet*, for he wanted it to be in perfect trim for the difficult work ahead of them.

Accordingly the propellers were again started and the motorship was driven here and there as a dirigible. It behaved well, too, and needed but little adjusting. Then they went far up above the clouds, and Mr. Snodgrass managed to get a new specimen of a fly, which greatly delighted him.

"Now for the hydroplanes, and I guess we'll be through," said the steersman, as he guided the craft toward the river and dropped down on the surface. The big floats buoyed up the motorship, and then, by the power of her propellers, she navigated the stream with considerable speed. A number of motor boats from the club saluted Jerry and his chums.

"Well, this sure is a great get-up!" complimented Mr. Brill. "She can travel on land, on water, and in the air."

"We can't do much in the way of land travel," said Jerry. "It isn't exactly an auto, and we only use the wheels to get a start when we depend on the planes. Of course, as a balloon, we can rise without getting a start first. But I guess we'll manage to drop down into that valley you told about."

"If you can't do it in this, nothing can," was the miner's opinion. "It sure is great!"

The following days were busy ones for the motor boys and their friends. The *Comet* had to be taken apart for shipment to the West, and many other preparations made for their long trip. They would travel by rail to Kabspell, and there reassemble their craft.

"Then we'll provision her well, I hope," exclaimed Bob.

"Oh, we'll let you look after that, Chunky," said Jerry, with a smile.

Their plan was to travel by rail to the small town in Montana where their airship would be sent. Once it was put together again they would use that exclusively.

"And I guess those grub-stakers will have trouble in following us in that machine!" exclaimed Mr. Brill, proudly.

"Noddy Nixon may make trouble," suggested Ned.

"He hasn't his airship with him this time," declared Jerry; "and I don't fancy he can pick up one out there in a hurry. I guess we can give him the slip."

"But Kabspell is quite a way from the valley where you hid the nuggets; isn't it?" asked Jim Nestor, of his partner.

"Yes, but we can easily make the valley from



there. The nearest place to it is a little settlement called Bolton, almost on the border between the United States and Canada. It is at the foot of the mountains, and the valley is off a rocky pass. I think we can easily find it. It isn't a great distance from the Blackfeet Indian Reservation."

"Do those Indians ever make trouble?" asked Ned.

"Oh, I suppose that once in a while some of them get tired of doing nothing and break off the reservation," admitted Mr. Brill. "But Jim and I have our guns and——"

"We'll take weapons, too," said Jerry; "but I hope the only use we find for them will be to shoot game."

"Is there game out there?" asked Ned, eagerly.

"Oh, yes," answered the Westerner. "Rocky Mountain goats, bears, and an occasional mountain lion or two. And plenty of small game."

"Good!" cried Ned. "We'll have some fun, even if we don't get the nuggets!"

"But you want to get them!" insisted his father, who was at the conference. "That's what we're depending on you for. The syndicate doesn't want to lose money!"

"Oh, we'll get 'em!" declared Jerry, confidently.

The preparations went on rapidly, and were

soon about done. The motorship had been forwarded in sections and a supply of gasoline arranged for in Kabspell. Ostensibly it was given out that the boys and their friends were going to help Professor Snodgrass hunt for luminous snakes, and other strange forms of animal life, and the scientist was not at all unwilling to head such an important expedition.

"And from now on," warned Jerry, when they were about ready to depart, "not a word about the sixty nuggets of gold unless we have to mention them. There's no telling who may be listening."

"That's right!" agreed his chums.

They were at the Cresville station. The last good-byes had been said, their baggage sent on ahead, and they were to begin the long trip to the border land. Andy Rush was there, looking wistful, for he would have liked to accompany his friends. Professor Snodgrass was wandering about, looking for new bugs, and hardly assuming the character of the leader of the expedition. But that did not so much matter now.

Suddenly, there appeared in the open door of the station a very stout woman, carrying a valise and much wrapped up in a large shawl. Her eyes roved over the group of travelers, and lighted on the form of Harvey Brill. Then with a shrill cry she rushed toward him, exclaiming:

## 98 THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE BORDER

"I've found him! Oh, I've found him! Oh, my dear nephew! I have found you at last! Come home with me! We need you so! Oh, I have found you!" and she dropped her satchel and rushed at the miner with extended arms.

As for Harvey Brill, his jaw dropped and a look almost of terror came into his eyes.

"Hide me!" he exclaimed. "Somebody hide me! This is the first of 'em! I've been expecting this!" and he ran out of the station, full into the arms of Mr. Hitter, the freight agent, the two going down in a heap.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE PROFESSOR IS MISSING

"WHAT's the matter?" cried Jerry.

"Something is wrong!" exclaimed Ned.

"Are they hurt?" asked Bob.

The two figures in the station doorway—Mr. Brill and the agent—were struggling to arise. Jim Nestor, perhaps with a half-formed notion that somebody was trying to rob his friend, made a motion toward his hip pocket, and then thought better of it.

The large lady, casting aside her shawl, made a rush for the two on the floor. Grasping Mr. Hitter by his coattails, she lifted him to his feet with ease—for he was not a large man. Then she assisted Mr. Brill to arise.

"Are you hurt, Harvey?" she cried. "Oh, say you're not hurt! I couldn't bear to hear that, and me just finding you! Oh, Harvey, have you lost any money? Are you hurt?"

Mr. Brill pulled himself away. He eyed Mr. Hitter for a moment as though he thought the agent might be responsible, and then he turned his gaze on the large woman.

"No, I'm not hurt," he said. "I—I'm all right. When is our train due?" he asked of the boys.

"Oh, Harvey, you're not going away again—after I have just found you; are you?" exclaimed the woman. "Aren't you coming to live with your dear aunt, and the children and your uncle? Your uncle hasn't any work now, and I know he'll be glad to see you."

"I expect he will," said Mr. Brill, gloomily; "only he isn't going to see me. If that train doesn't come soon, I'm going to walk!" he added, desperately.

"There's the whistle!" exclaimed Ned.

"But what's it all about?" asked Jerry.

"Oh, Harvey, don't leave me!" pleaded the big woman, again making a rush for him.

"Keep her back—somebody!" cried Mr. Brill. "Don't let her get hold of me. Hurry out to the train."

Once more he made a rush for the door.

"Look here!" cried Mr. Hitter. "You're the fellow who found the gold on the track, and nearly had the railroad torn up in consequence. Are you going to do it again? Are you going to look for more gold?"

"I am not!" fairly yelled Mr. Brill. "Let me get aboard the train!"

Once more the whistle shrilly sounded.

"Come on!" cried the Westerner, making a break for the door, and pushing Mr. Hitter aside.

"Stop! Wait for me, Harvey!" cried the large woman. "I want you to come with me. We need you—the children need you. Did you bring any gold with you from the West? Oh! I have had such a time finding you."

"Come on!" cried Mr. Brill. "If I don't get away now I never will!"

The train pulled into the station, and the Westerner fairly threw himself aboard. Mr. Hitter rushed off to look after some baggage, and Jim Nestor and the boys followed their excited friend.

"What's it all about?" asked Bob, much puzzled.

"Give it up," replied Jerry. "Maybe that's one of the poor relations he was telling about, who want him to support them. He'll tell us in the train, I guess. Come on, Professor!"

"Wait! Wait!" cried the stout lady; but with a wave of his hand Mr. Brill disappeared into the smoker.

The motor boys climbed up the steps of the coach. Professor Snodgrass, making a grab for a rare bug he saw at the last moment, followed. The big woman attempted to board the train, but it was too late, and as it pulled out of the station she was last seen running after the cars, while, in

the smoker, Mr. Brill was heard to say with much fervor:

"Oh what a lucky escape!"

"What was it all about?" asked Jerry, when they were all together in the parlor car where they had seats, Mr. Brill having moved forward. "Was she one of your relations?"

"She was," answered the miner, "and one of the worst. She called herself my aunt, but she was more like a forty-second cousin. For years I almost supported her and her family. Her husband won't work—he thinks he's got heart disease. I gave her what I could spare, and more too, just as I did a whole lot of others who thought because I was a gold miner, that I was rich. But I wasn't.

"How she found out I was in the East I don't know, but some of the poor relations out West must have sent word that I had come on. Then she traced me—though I don't know how—and I suppose she came for money. But I got away—thank goodness! I got away. If she had found me earlier she'd have made life miserable for me. I had—well, you know what," he added, in a whisper, referring to the sixty nuggets of gold. "It had to be kept quiet, and that's why I didn't want to get the sheriff and a posse to recover my stuff. Word would have gotten out that I had it

and then—well, I wouldn't have had it, that's all."

"I guess you're safe now," remarked Ned, with a smile, as he recalled the scene of excitement in the depot.

"But she was very determined," added Bob.

"She was something like you, Chunky—in build," spoke Jerry, dryly. "Well, we're off, anyhow."

The train sped through familiar scenery and the boys and their friends gave themselves up to the delights of it. Mr. Snodgrass busied himself making notes of the specimens he had captured.

A few seats up from where our friends sat, was a man with a very black moustache, very "loud" clothing, and a watch chain that looked strong enough to restrain a bulldog. He had cast curious glances at the party as they boarded the train, and he looked particularly at Mr. Nestor and Mr. Brill. Presently he sauntered in their direction, and, pulling out a cigar case, said:

"I guess I'm right in sizing you folks up for a party of prospectors and miners; am I not?"

For a moment there was silence, and then Jerry asked:

"What makes you think so?" for the lad feared they had by accident mentioned the hidden gold.



"Oh, these gentlemen look like grub-stakers who have struck it rich," and he indicated the two Westerners. "Will you come back and have a smoke with me?" he invited.

Jim Nestor looked at Jerry, who shook his head slightly.

"I guess we don't care to smoke, stranger," said the mine superintendent. "And, as for sizing us up as prospectors who have struck it rich, you've got another guess coming. We're out with Professor Uriah Snodgrass in a search for luminous snakes."

"Snakes! Huh!" exclaimed the man, who looked like a gambler or "sport."

"Exactly!" exclaimed the professor, hearing his favorite topic mentioned. "Snakes of light—*illustris serpens*—Do you happen to know anything of them, sir?"

"Who, me? I should say not!" and the man, evidently much disappointed, moved away.

"He got his all right!" chuckled Ned.

"Yes; evidently he thought to scrape an acquaintance and get us to talk," said Jerry.

"But he had no use for bug-hunters!" chuckled Mr. Brill. "That's a good stunt, boys; to pretend to be scientists. We'll keep it up. We can't be too careful."

They traveled all that day and night, little of incident occurring. The black-moustached man

did not trouble them further. The next day found them well on their way to the border.

The car they were traveling in was a comfortable one, and they would not have to change for some time. There was a dining coach attached to the train, and Bob rejoiced in looking over the bill of fare when he had nothing else to do.

It was on the second day out, and toward evening when they were just beginning to think about supper that Jerry, who had been walking through the train to "stretch his legs," came back to his friends.

"Have any of you seen the professor?" he asked, and his voice was a bit troubled.

"The professor?" asked Ned. "Why, he was here a while ago, making notes to beat the band."

"So I saw," spoke Jerry. "Then I noticed him get up to go for a drink of water. He didn't come back, and I went looking for him. He isn't on the train, as far as I can find, and we haven't made any stops since."

"Could he have fallen off?" asked Bob, uneasily.

"By Jove!" cried Ned. "It would be just like him. He may have gone on the platform, seen a rare bug, and in reaching for it lost his balance and fallen off. I wonder——"

But Ned did not continue. At that instant the

train came to a sudden stop with a grinding of brakes—such a sudden stop that nearly everyone in the car was thrown from his seat.

“An accident!” yelled Bob.

“We’re going to smash!” cried Ned.

“Something has happened to the professor!” came from Jerry.

“Maybe it’s a hold-up!” ejaculated Jim Nestor, and this time he drew from his hip pocket something shining. Harvey Brill followed his example.

## CHAPTER XIII

### A SUSPICIOUS CHARACTER

WITH a further grinding of the brake shoes on the wheels, and many bumps, the train came to an abrupt stop. But there followed no terrifying crash, no overturning of the coaches, no splintering of woodwork, no bending of steel trusses, and no explosion of the locomotive boiler.

The passengers who had been tossed from their seats slowly arose, little the worse for the adventure save bruises. Then came a silence, to be broken by Bob, who asked:

“What happened?”

“Lots of things, I guess,” replied Ned, rubbing his elbow where it had come in contact with the edge of a seat.

“We may have just escaped a collision,” said Jerry, starting toward the door. “That was the emergency air brake that went on so suddenly.”

“It’s a hold-up—that’s what it is!” declared Jim Nestor. “I’ve been through ’em before and I know. Get your guns ready, boys. You’re heeled, aren’t you, Harvey?”

"I sure am, and I'm ready to fight at the drop of the hat. I haven't much with me, but what I have I'm going to keep."

"Same here," declared Jim, getting behind one of the chair seats, after he had picked himself up out of a corner where he had been tossed by the sudden, jolting stop of the train. "Get behind one of these chairs, Harvey," advised the mine foreman, "and when the rascals come in cover 'em before they get a chance to get the drop on us."

"I'm wise, partner!"

The door at the end of the car opened and a man rushed in.

"Hands up!" yelled Jim and Harvey, in the same breath, and from behind the backs of their respective chairs two shining weapons covered the intruder. "Hands up! You can't come any game like that!" went on Harvey Brill.

"What—what's that? Train robbers! How did they get in here! I see! That's why the brake cord was pulled! I—I——"

"Put up your guns!" cried Jerry, with a laugh. "This is the Pullman conductor, Jim. Put away those pistols! It's all right, I tell you!"

Slowly Jim and his friend peered over the tops of the seats, and, as they saw the uniform of the train official, sheepish smiles spread over their countenances.

"Well, I'll be horn-swoggled!" exclaimed Jim.

"And I'll be grub-staked!" added Harvey, that seeming to be a favorite expression of his.

"Oh, you took me for a hold-up man!" exclaimed the conductor, a note of relief in his voice.

"And I did the same by you. But something happened. Someone pulled the emergency air brake cord, and stopped the train almost within a length. Did any one here do it? And what for?"

"No one that we saw," replied Jerry. "But something has evidently happened. One of our party—the head of it I may say," he added, thinking to carry out the plan they had adopted—"Professor Snodgrass—is missing. I just discovered that he was gone when the train was pulled up. We fear he may have fallen off in going from one car to another."

"That is hardly possible," said the conductor. "This is a vestibuled train, and it is as safe to go from one car to another as it is to walk the length of a coach. He could not have fallen off."

"Then where is he?" asked Ned, and the boys looked at one another in alarm. At that moment, from the rear end of the car they were in, came a voice crying:

"I have it! Oh, I have you my little beauty! You tried to get away from me, but I have you!"

"The professor!" cried Ned, Bob and Jerry, in a chorus.

They made a rush in the direction of the voice, and, a moment later, they saw their eccentric friend perched high up in a corner of the outer vestibule of the parlor car. He was supporting himself by standing on some small iron projection, his head was well up under the "hood" of the car, and, while clinging with one hand to the emergency air brake cord, with the other he clutched his prize.

"Is—is that you, Professor?" asked Jerry, hardly knowing what he was saying.

"Certainly it is, my boy," was the calm answer, as the scientist surveyed the little group of astonished ones on the car platform below him. "Certainly I am here."

"And—and did you——?" faltered Jerry.

"I certainly did. I captured it, the little beauty!" interrupted the scientist. "It is a most perfect specimen of the jumping Buffalo moth I have ever seen. I was passing from one car to the other when here, in the vestibule, I saw the moth. I tried to get it, but it jumped higher and higher, and I was forced to climb up. Then I got it, when it could go no farther."

"No, what I meant," explained Jerry, "was, did you pull the emergency air brake cord?"

"Oh, do you mean this thing?" innocently

asked the professor, indicating the cord to which he was clinging with one hand. "Well, perhaps I did give it a yank. I had to hold on to it, you know, or else lose the jumping moth, and I did not want to do that. Perhaps I may have jerked the cord—this way——" and he was about to pull it again, when the conductor yelled:

"Don't do that! Great Scott! The engineer has nervous prostration now, and we don't want to scare him any more. Don't pull that cord again!"

"Oh, very well," agreed the professor, gently. "Will some one kindly give me a hand down? I don't want to lose the moth. But why did the train stop so suddenly? Did we hit anything?"

"You stopped it," explained Jerry, as he helped his friend down. "You put on the brakes when you pulled that cord."

"Did I?" asked the scientist, innocently. "How odd! Well, I won't do it again. Now to take care of my prize."

"Well, I'll be grub-staked!" ejaculated Harvey Brill, and as the conductor gave the engineer the signal to go ahead again, our party of friends returned to their seats, while trainmen went about explaining to the other passengers the cause of the emergency stop.

For that was what it was. On most trains there is a red cord, in addition to the one that com-



municates with an air whistle in the engineer's cab. The pulling of this red cord automatically sets the air brakes, and, in supporting himself under the "hood," or overhanging part of the vestibule of the coach, the professor had, by accident, pulled this cord. Of course the brakes went on quickly, and confusion resulted.

But no great harm was done, save to delay the train somewhat, and when the cause was explained no one blamed the innocent and absent-minded scientist. As for himself, he thought no more of the occurrence, being so busy putting the jumping moth in a box, and making notes concerning his prize. Then he began reading something about the luminous snakes from a book he carried.

Another day's travel, during which they ate on the train, sleeping at night in comfortable berths, brought them to where they changed to the Great Northern Railroad.

"And now we're beginning the last stage of our trip," explained Jerry, who had been studying the route and timetables. "We'll soon be in Kab-spell."

"And nothing has happened—that is, nothing much," said Ned.

"The meals were pretty good," observed Bob, patting the region beneath his belt.

"Say, is that all you think of?" demanded Ned. "I meant that nothing troublesome had

happened. We haven't been followed, and no suspicious characters seem to be spying on us."

"Not since I got rid of that distant aunt of mine," added Mr. Brill, with a sigh of relief. "Say, if she ever finds out I've got money I'll never have any peace. She'll tell all the rest of my poor relations, who seem to dislike work, and it will be all up with me. So, even if we find the sixty—I mean what we are after," he hurriedly corrected himself, "don't let on that any of it is mine—at least not while she's around," and he glanced nervously about as though fearful that the stout lady might somehow have followed him. But she was not present.

The journey on the Great Northern was pleasant traveling, and the boys went through a wonderful bit of country. It seemed that their journey was to be almost an uneventful one until, near the very end of it, something occurred that set them all on edge, and made the two Westerners very uneasy.

In accordance with their plan, Professor Snodgrass was spoken of as the ostensible head of the expedition, and to all who engaged our friends in conversation the impression was given that the capture of some rare snakes, as well as other specimens, was the object. The professor's character naturally bore out this, especially after his stopping of the train.

"Let's get out here and stretch our legs," suggested Ned, when they reached the junction of the Great Northern line with the Great Falls and Canada Railroad.

"Yes, we haven't far to travel now," observed Mr. Brill. "We've been in Montana for some time. We're not far from the Canadian border, and in a little while we'll be at the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. From here it's only about seventy-five miles to Kabspell, but the grades are rather steep. We won't make very good time."

"I only hope our airship is there," said Jerry. "Once we get that together, and in working order, we'll be independent of grades and railroads."

As their train was to stop some little time they walked about to vary the monotony of riding in the cars. The professor, of course, no sooner found himself on "*terra-cotta*," as Bob expressed it, than he began hunting for specimens.

As the boys entered the station, to look about, they saw sitting in the corner a roughly dressed man, evidently a miner. He had a scar on his face. And Jerry, who was always on the lookout for anyone who might be regarded as an enemy, saw the fellow start as he caught a glimpse of Harvey Brill.

Without seeming to do so, the tall lad whispered to the prospector, calling his attention to

the suspicious character, and asking Mr. Brill if he had ever seen him before.

Stealing a casual glance at the stranger, Mr. Brill whispered back:

"Never saw him before, so far as I know. If he's one of the grub-stakers I don't know him."

"Maybe I'm mistaken," agreed Jerry; "but he seemed some excited when he first got a glimpse of you. I guess it's all right, though. Anyhow, I hope so."

He and the others went out of the station, and the man, after a glance at the retreating forms, slid up to the ticket window.

"I guess I'll change my destination, partner," he said to the man behind the wicket. "I'll travel on the Great Northern instead of on the Great Falls. Can you swap tickets for me?"

"Oh, I suppose so," grumbled the agent. "What's up?"

"Nothing, only some friends of mine are going that way, and I guess I'll trail along. I've been waiting some time for them to show up, and, now that they're here I don't like to lose 'em. Just switch tickets for me."

And so it came about that, as Jerry and his friends boarded their train again, they were unaware of the fact that the suspicious character—the man with the scar—was riding in the smoking car behind them.

"I guess I'm on the right trail," murmured the man who had changed his tickets. "It's him all right, from the description, though I don't know what he's doing with them boys, and the little man with the bald head, who seems to be after mosquitoes all the while. And that other chap, too. He's a Westerner, or I miss my guess. Well, we'll see what happens," and he settled himself comfortably back in the seat, and looked at his ticket, which read "Kabspell."

## CHAPTER XIV

### IN KABSPELL

"HERE you go, Bob, hand me that monkey wrench."

"It's right behind you, Jerry. Say, though, I've forgotten whether these side planes, or the rear ones, go on first."

"The rear ones, of course," spoke Ned. "We won't put the side planes on until last, and then they won't interfere. Look out, don't step in that pile of bolts. I've got 'em arranged in the order I want to use 'em."

"Oh, I won't," and the stout lad changed the planes he had taken up, selecting another set.

"Who's got the hammer?" demanded Jerry, a little later.

"You had it last," answered Ned.

"I did not. You sang out for it and I fired it over to you."

"That's right. I'd forgotten. I've got it. Now, boys, get a move on, and we'll soon have her in shape."

It was the third day after the arrival of our heroes and their friends in the small town of Kabspell, Montana, and they were busy assembling their motorship, which had arrived safely a short time before.

They had secured a boarding place, and had arranged to use an old shed on the outskirts of the town as a "hangar" in which to assemble the parts of their craft. They found everything all right, save that one of the hydroplane floats had been smashed, but a local carpenter had agreed to make another.

The arrival of the lads and the mysterious craft had created no little astonishment in the town, and such a crowd assembled in and about the shed that the motor boys were forced to put up ropes, and hire a man to keep back the throng, so they would have room to work.

"We don't mind them watching us," said Jerry; "but we don't want to step on them all the while, and they will insist on fingering things. First we know, some part will be missing, and then we'll be in a pretty fix."

Jim Nestor and Harvey Brill offered their aid in reassembling the motorship, and their services were gladly accepted. One or two mechanics had also been hired to fit the motor and gas machine together, as the boys found themselves pretty well occupied. But, for the most part, the boys

did the work themselves. They were familiar with their craft, and knew just how to put it together, having taken it apart several times.

"Is there anything I can do?" inquired Professor Snodgrass, as he entered the shed on the morning when the activities of the lads brought forth the utterances with which I began this chapter. "I'd like to help," went on the little bald-headed scientist, eagerly.

"No, I guess not," said Jerry, winking at Ned. "We won't take you from your researches."

"Well, then, as long as you don't want me," proceeded the "bugologist," gladly, "I'll see if I can locate a side-stepping toad. I saw traces of one not long ago."

"A side-stepping toad!" exclaimed Bob. "That's a new one."

"It isn't good to eat, though, Chunky!" chuckled Ned, taking care to get out of reach of his fat chum.

"But what is it?" asked Bob.

"It's a toad that moves sideways, like a crab," explained the scientist. "They are very rare, and only a few museums have them. I shall count myself fortunate if I find one—almost as fortunate as if I get a luminous serpent. By the way, when shall we be able to start for them?"



"In a few days," replied Jerry; and then the professor went out. "I'm glad he didn't insist on wanting to help," he added to Ned.

"That's right. The last time he did he fitted the exhaust pipe to the gasoline intake, and we'd have had a dandy explosion if we hadn't seen it in time."

"And before that," commented the tall lad, "he had the elevation rudder rigged up so that we'd have shot downward instead of going up. He did it before I found out what he was up to. No, the professor is a fine man, but what he doesn't know about an airship would fill a few books. Now, Ned, if you'll give me a hand we'll connect the gasoline tank to the motor, and then fit up the pilot house controls."

The boys and their helpers were busily engaged that afternoon when a man, who, somehow, had made his way past the guard, sauntered into the shed.

"When do you fellers calculate on givin' th' circus?" he drawled.

"This isn't a circus," replied Jerry, hoping the fellow was not going to be annoyingly curious.

"No? Wa'al, you're goin' t' give an exhibition; aren't you?"

"Oh, we'll let the people see us fly, of course, when we get ready," answered the tall lad, good-naturedly.

"Fly? Do you really mean t' say you folks are goin' up in that thing?" asked the man, incredulously.

"Well, we've done it many times before this, and if all goes right we'll do it again," spoke Ned.

"Great Peter!" cried the man. "I thought it was only a model t' look at. An' you're really goin' t' fly?"

"We sure are," said Jerry. "Here, Ned, just hold this bolt, while I tighten the nut, will you?"

"What does this handle do?" asked the man, as he pulled one of the many levers.

"That works the elevating rudder," replied Jerry. "Please don't touch it."

"All right," agreed the man, good-naturedly. "But what are you folks aimin' t' do when you do get your shebang together?"

It was the question the boys had been anticipating ever since they arrived in Kabspell, and they were ready for it.

"Did you see that small man—the one with no hair on his head?" asked Jerry, with a wink at his chums.

"The one I passed as I was comin' in? Yes, I saw him."

"Well, he wants to get a lot of queer bugs—insects—snakes and the like," went on Jerry.

"He's a professor in a big college—a bug collector. We're with him."

"Oh, shucks!" exclaimed the man, as if much disappointed. "I calculated you were prospectors, or something like that."

"Why, is there gold out here?" asked Jerry, as innocently as he could.

"Wa'al, there is for them as knows where it is," spoke the man with a sharp look at the boys and the two Westerners. But our friends did not betray themselves—at least they hoped they did not.

The work went on apace, and soon the inquisitive man was peering about at another part of the airship.

"What's this wheel for?" he asked. As he spoke he gave it a turn, and at once a series of thunderous explosions followed—like a battery of machine guns going off.

"Great Peter!" cried the man, and with one jump he leaped through an open window of the shed, and, running across the field, he yelled:

"She's going to blow up!" Skedaddle, everybody!"

The crowd, which was always assembled about the shed, turned to flee, but the explosions suddenly ceased.

"What was it?" cried Bob, seeing that there was no danger. He and Ned had run for the

engine room, in which Jerry had been working when the man meddled with the wheel.

"Oh, that fellow started the motor, and the muffler wasn't attached," answered the tall lad. "No damage done. I stopped her in time. But maybe it will teach him a lesson."

It seemed to, for the fellow did not come back. Instead, he went to a certain resort in the town, and there he met a man with a long scar on his face—a livid scar.

"Well, did you find out anything?" asked the man with the scar. "Did you get next, Ike Weldon?"

"All I found out, Jake Baxton, was that they're hunting for bugs—as if they couldn't get enough without lookin' for 'em. That's what they told me, and then th' shebang blew up!"

"Blew up—how?"

"Well, I monkeyed with it, I guess," and Ike Weldon told of the results of his visit.

"Say, you're a pretty one to send to get information!" exclaimed Jake, with contempt. "I thought you knew your business!"

"I do. They're after bugs, I tell you!"

"I don't believe it. They wouldn't come away out here with an airship for that. I'll have to fix up some sort of a disguise and go myself. They saw me at the Junction, where I changed my ticket, and they might know me. But I'm sure

that's the man we want to keep track of—that biggest Westerner. I'll go around there myself to-morrow."

"Well, don't go to handling anything, or you might get blown up too," advised his crony. "Hello!" he exclaimed, suddenly. "Here comes that other chap from the East—the one who arrived a few days ago—Nixon his name is. Maybe he knows something about these chaps."

"I'll see if I can get him to talk," remarked Jake. "I think I'm on the right trail, and just as soon as some of the other boys get here I'll make sure of it. They know Harvey Brill, and I don't—only by description. Yes, I'll see what I can get out of this Nixon chap."

## CHAPTER XV

### OFF IN THE MOTORSHIP

"WELL, Jerry, do you think we can soon give her a trial?" asked Ned.

"Yes, I think we'll chance it to-morrow, if the weather is good. The winds are pretty high in this region, and I don't want to run any risks until I know I've got the *Comet* well under control. But I guess we'll have a trial flight to-morrow."

It was about a week after their arrival in Kabspell, and the time had been occupied in re-assembling their craft. The work had gone on well, and they had not been further annoyed by any visits from the man who so unexpectedly started the motor that day. True, others had sought to gain admission to the shed, but the man on guard had been told to be very strict, and no more strangers had been admitted.

"It's queer we haven't run across Noddy Nixon, or Bill Berry, since we arrived," remarked Bob, as he came from the kitchen of the motorship, where he had been getting the electric

stove in readiness for cooking meals when they should be aloft. The craft was still in the shed, but would soon be ready to be wheeled out and sent skyward.

"Maybe he didn't come here after all," suggested Ned.

"Oh, I believe he did," declared Jerry. "Noddy isn't the kind of a fellow to give up when he sees a chance to annoy us. I believe he found out, in some way, that we were coming here; and he suspects what for. If he hasn't shown himself it's because he doesn't want us to see him."

"And there are a lot of strangers in town," went on Bob. "There have been rumors of a rich strike somewhere out this way, and the miners are just pouring into Kabspell."

"I hope none of my old grub-stakers get here," spoke Harvey Brill. "I'm not afraid of 'em, but I don't want to get you boys into trouble if I can help it."

"Well, we'll be ready for it if it comes," said Jerry, confidently. "Once we get off in the *Comet* they'll have their own troubles following us."

They worked hard that day, and spent most of the morning putting the finishing touches to their craft. Professor Snodgrass went about as his fancy dictated, making strange and odd cap-

tures at intervals. If he did not find the side-stepping toad at least he was hopeful of soon finding the luminous snakes.

It was not far to the border valley where the boys hoped to locate not only the queer serpents, but also the sixty nuggets of gold. Truth to tell, they were getting anxious for the real search to begin.

The last bolts had been screwed into place, the final adjustments made, the tanks were filled with gasoline, the electrical connections were all made, and the gas machine was in readiness to produce the powerful lifting vapor when needed. The extra machanics had been paid off, and, true to his prediction, Jerry was ready to give the motorship a trial.

"Where are you going in her?" asked Ned, as he and his chums made some final tests of the mechanism.

"Oh, nowhere in particular. I just thought we'd go up a way, circle about, maybe descend on Flathead Lake and then come back here. We may find she needs a little tuning up. After we give her that we can stock our lockers, and start for the Border."

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Brill, and Jim Nestor echoed the words.

A great crowd had assembled, for, somehow, word had gone forth that the motorship was to



make a flight. Most of the men—for there were only a few women—were openly incredulous. As the craft was wheeled from the shed a lad in the throng cried:

“Watch 'em sail—not!”

“They’ll never get that off the ground!” declared several.

“That’s right. She’s too heavy. Might as well try to go above the clouds in a wash-tub, or a pair of rubber boots.”

Indeed the *Comet* did look rather big and heavy, but the crowd did not know the power that lay in the great propellers, or in the lifting gas.

Jerry and his chums went carefully over every bit of machinery. The two Westerners were in their places, a trifle anxious. Professor Snodgrass had been induced to give up his bug-hunting long enough to go aboard for the trial.

The scientist was now in the main cabin, calmly making notes about his captures, as oblivious of his surroundings and the curious throng in the field, as if he was in his library at home.

“All ready?” asked Jerry of Ned, taking his place in the pilot house.

“All ready,” was the low answer.

“Then let her go!”

There was a splutter of sparks, a grinding sound, a series of explosions, and then a whirring

noise as the great propeller blades began to revolve, slowly at first and then with a speed that made them mere blurs of light.

The *Comet* began to move slowly over the smooth ground.

"Hal-Hal!" laughed many in the crowd. "We knew she wouldn't go up!"

But, hardly had they spoken, when Jerry tilted the elevation rudder. With a sweep and a swoop, the great motorship left the earth, shot over the heads of the crowd—the nearest ones instinctively ducking, though there was no need—and a few seconds later the airship was sailing majestically toward the clouds.

"Hurrah!" cried Bob. "We're off again!"

For a moment the startled throng was silent, and then, as before their very eyes the seemingly impossible feat had been accomplished, they set up a great cheer, which came faintly to the ears of the motor boys.

"And now for the valley of the sixty nuggets of gold!" exclaimed Mr. Brill, there being none but friends to hear him.

"Not quite yet," said Jerry, with a smile; "She needs a little adjusting before she answers to her rudders perfectly. But we can do that tomorrow, stock up the next day and set off."

Before going back to their improvised "hangar," however, they went out to Flathead Lake,

where they settled down to the surface of the water to give the hydroplanes a trial. They worked well, the new one being as good as the others.

Then back again over the heads of the astonished, waiting throng they sailed, to settle down as gracefully as a bird in front of the shed.

"Simon's grandmother!" gasped one of the formerly skeptical men. "I never thought they could do it! Never!"

While Jerry spent most of the next day in making some necessary changes, his chums saw to the stocking of the craft with food and supplies, for they did not know how long they would be on the Border.

It was quite windy the morning set for the start, but Jerry, after a dubious look at the clouds, decided that they would delay no longer.

"We may strike a calm zone up above," he said.

The last preparations were made, and with the motor boys and their friends aboard the *Comet*, Jerry gave the word to start. Once more came that nerve-thrilling rush across the ground, and then the quick ascent into the air. Again the crowd cheered, waving their hats and even jumping up and down in an ecstasy of wonder at something they had heard of, but never before seen.

"Well, they're off, Ike," remarked a man with a scar on his face, to another man in the crowd. "Now I wonder if we can trail 'em?"

"It isn't going to be easy on horses, and yet that Nixon chap claims to know about where they'll head for."

"Where is he?"

"Oh, he said he wanted to keep under cover,—claimed they'd make trouble if they saw him. He'll meet us on the main road just outside of town."

"All right, come on then," and the man with the scar and his confederate leaped on their horses and galloped off, taking as nearly as they could the course of the airship above them. A little later they were joined by a third person.

Bob, in the kitchen of the aircraft, with nothing to do until it came time to get dinner, took up a pair of field glasses and focussed them on the earth below. They were well away from the crowd now, and Bob caught sight of three figures on horses, seemingly racing below them.

"That's queer," he murmured. "It looks as if they were trying to follow us, And—and—why, if that isn't Noddy Nixon!"

He looked eagerly through the glasses and then called to Jerry, who, setting the automatic steering gear, came back to the galley on a run.

"Isn't that Noddy?" demanded Bob, in great excitement.

"It sure is," agreed the tall lad, after a look. "And one of the men is that same chap we saw in the depot—the one I suspected of being a grub-staker! Fellows, we're being followed! But I don't believe they can keep it up long!"

## CHAPTER XVI

### A FRIGHTENED SETTLEMENT

SILENCE greeted the announcement of Jerry Hopkins, and for a few moments all gazed downward on the horsemen below them—that is, all but Professor Snodgrass. It would need something more than this to take him away from his notebooks.

“Just show ’em that we don’t care about ’em,” proposed Ned. “Scoot down toward ’em, Jerry, and then speed up for all you’re worth. We can easily leave ’em behind.”

“That’s right,” chimed in Bob. “You do that, and I’ll see about getting something to eat.”

“Something to eat!” exclaimed Jim Nestor. “Why, we had breakfast only a little while ago.”

“You don’t know Chunky,” said Jerry, with a smile. “From now on he’s going to live in the cooking galley.”

“I am not!” indignantly exclaimed the stout lad. “And if I did, I guess you fellows would be glad of it, for you’re generally as hungry as I am.”

"All right, Chunky, we'll forgive you," spoke Ned.

"But, how about fooling Noddy, Jerry?"

"I guess it won't do any harm. Here goes."

He went back to the engine room, and while the others in the party watched those below them, who sought to get on the trail of the sixty nuggets of gold, Jerry sent the *Comet* down until they could hear the excited shouts of one of the horsemen with Noddy.

"That's the grub-staker!" exclaimed Ned.

"He doesn't know much about airships, and I guess he thinks we're going to smash into him."

"Noddy and Bill are taking it calmly enough," observed the tall lad, as indeed the two plotters were, for they could be seen gazing up at the motorship as if they knew its power and what it would do. But the other man was yelling excitedly, and urging his steed to one side.

The motor boys were too far away to permit them to hear what was being said, but it was evident that Noddy and Bill were trying to reassure their companion.

"Now show 'em our heels!" cried Ned and, as Jerry set the motor to full speed ahead, the *Comet* leaped forward on an upward slant and soon was but a speck in the sky, while the disappointed horsemen tried in vain to follow its flight.

"They've given us the slip!" exclaimed Bill Berry.

"Never mind, we've seen in what direction they started," declared Noddy. "And you know the best place to head for; don't you?" he asked of the other man.

"I reckon so," replied the grub-staker. "But I never thought they could handle an airship so. Why, they might ram us!"

"Oh, it's easy enough to handle one of those things," spoke Noddy, half contemptuously. "I have done it." But in his own heart he knew he had never managed a craft with the skill of the motor boys.

Our friends continued on their upward flight until the lost sight of the horsemen, and they knew they, themselves, must be but a mere speck in the sky.

"Now let 'em follow—if they can!" exclaimed Jerry, as he set the automatic steering gear. "How about that grub you spoke of, Bob?"

"It'll be ready soon. What did I tell you?" demanded the vindicated stout lad, with a laugh. "I said you'd be hungry as soon as I was."

"Well, this high altitude—ahem!" laughed the tall lad. "Serve it up, Bob!" he added, with assumed dignity.

During the meal they talked over their plans, and it was decided, first of all, to stick to the



original scheme of pretending to be attached to the professor's scientific party.

"We'll go to Bolton," said Jim Nestor. "That's the nearest settlement of any account this side of the Border, and near the valley you spoke of, Harvey."

"Yes, I guess Bolton would be the best place," assented the prospector. "I was there just before I made my strike, and from there I can lay out the course to the valley. There's only one thing bothering me, though."

"What is that?" asked Jim.

"Well, you see the only way I can locate that valley is by the landmarks on the surface. There are two or three things by which I could tell when I got to the head of it. But, being up in the air this way, I don't see how I'm going to recognize 'em."

"Oh, that will be easy," asserted Jerry. "We can make a descent whenever we want to, and look about. If you see any signs that would tell us we were near the valley, then we can rise above the hills again, and move along until we are hovering over the big gash. Then we can drop down into it."

"Drop down into it!" exclaimed the prospector, for he had not yet gotten used to hearing Jerry and the others speaking so naturally of a "drop" from the clouds.

"Well, that is, drop gently," explained Jerry, with a smile.

This plan appealed to all as a good one, and it was adopted. That day they skimmed along, not going at any great speed after they had left Noddy and his cronies behind. At night, to prevent being blown too far off their course, in case a wind should spring up, they descended into a little valley, where they anchored. Harvey Brill recognized the place as one where he had once prospected without results.

"We're not many miles, as the crow flies, from the Border valley," said the old prospector, as he looked about him; "though it took me a good while to make that distance, traveling on foot."

The night passed uneventfully, but, when morning dawned, they found that a stiff gale was blowing. Sheltered as they were, they did not realize the strength of it, but, when they ascended, the *Comet* was almost pitched on her "beam ends" once she was above the shelter of the hills.

"Say, this is fierce!" cried Ned, who was in the pilot house, helping Jerry, while Bob attended to the engine room. "We'd better go down, Jerry!"

"I think so—myself!" panted the tall lad, struggling to pull over the lever of the deflecting

rudder. "I want to—but this is stuck!" he cried. "It's gotten jammed in some way!"

"What can we do?"

"Scud along—that's the only chance until the wind slackens. Then, when there isn't so much pressure on the planes, I can work the rudder."

And scud they did, their speed being increased by the power of the wind. They were not flying high, and Jerry dared not send the craft up any farther for fear of getting into a still breezier stratum of air.

"I hope we don't hit anything!" he murmured, as he watched the speed and pressure gauges in the pilot house. Ned stood beside him, ready to help, and Jim Nestor had been pressed into service in the motor room. The professor was, as usual, busy over his books, and Harvey Brill was moving restlessly about, half fearing the danger he knew surrounded them.

It was about noon when Ned, who was looking from the forward port of the pilot house, exclaimed:

"Jerry, I think we'll have to go up whether we want to or not. There's a big cliff just ahead of us, and we're heading right for it."

Jerry sprang to his chum's side, and quickly made some calculations.

"I think we can just about clear it," he said. "If we can, so much the better, for I have a no-

tion that it's blowing great guns higher up. I think we can clear it."

He and Ned watched anxiously, their hands on the levers ready to send the *Comet* up if necessary. But, as they approached the cliff, they saw that they could clear it by a small margin.

"And a good thing, too," declared Jerry, with a glance aloft at the scudding clouds.

They crossed the pinnacle of the small mountain, and on the other side, saw, stretched before them, a level plain. On the far edge could be made out a small village or settlement.

"There's Bolton!" exclaimed Jim Nestor.  
"We're near the Border now!"

On rushed the *Comet*, and, as it came nearer the town, under better control now, for the wind had fallen off somewhat, a curious scene was presented. There was an outpouring of men and a few women—a horde of horsemen, and all gathered in a compact mass to watch the oncoming motorship.

As it approached nearer, cries of wonder could be heard, and then, as the craft swept straight for the settlement, with Jerry in the pilot house looking for a smooth place to make a landing, the whole population turned, and fled as though some pursuing demon was after them.

"They're scared out of their wits!" cried Ned.  
"I guess they never saw an airship before."

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE BLACKFEET

WITH the airship rushing onward, those aboard it looked at the strange sight below them. In a few seconds they were fairly over the heads of the scampering populace, and, as the dim shadow of the aircraft fell on them, several women screamed with fright, and a number of men drew their big revolvers.

"This won't do!" cried Jerry. "We don't want a lot of bullet holes in the gas bag," for it was partly inflated. "Hi!" he yelled, leaning out of the pilot house window, as he shut off the motor to make his words heard. "You're in no danger! Don't be afraid! Don't shoot! It's all right, we're going to land!"

"What is it? Oh, what is it?" cried one woman, clinging to her husband.

"Bless me if I know," he replied. "Maybe it's the end of the world."

"This is an airship—an aeroplane—a balloon!" yelled Jerry, as he signalled to Ned to volplane to earth. "You must have seen pictures

of 'em—read about 'em!" he went on. "We're only an airship!"

This served, in a measure, to calm the fears of most of those who were racing over the plain. They slowed up, and, as the *Comet* came to rest on the ground, rolling along on the wheels, the crowd saw that there was no danger. Some even ventured to approach closer.

"I have seen pictures of the contraptions," said one man, slowly; "but they didn't look nothin' like this shebang!"

"Well, this is somewhat different," explained Jerry, as he and his party alighted.

"I hadn't no notion that they made as much racket as that, neither," spoke another man.

"And they come on you lickity split," spoke a third. "I thought hosses had t' pull 'em, or suthin' like that."

By this time the throng had approached still nearer and even the most timid now ventured to inspect the curious craft that had so suddenly, and strangely, appeared in their midst. Later the boys learned that Bolton was so remote from the ordinary line of travel, and that its inhabitants had so few opportunities of looking at the newspapers or magazines, that few, if any of them, had a real idea of what an airship was like. Consequently the sudden appearance of the *Comet* was enough to startle even the bravest.

But the boys were made welcome, and were asked to partake of the hospitality of the place. There was in Bolton what passed for a hotel, but Bob whispered:

"We can get better meals ourselves than they can serve. Let's stick to the ship."

"I believe you're right, Chunky," assented Jerry. "We will."

Once the first fright and curiosity was over, the minds of the villagers naturally turned to the object that had brought the voyagers in their midst. By this time Professor Snodgrass had put aside his note books, and was stalking along through the crowd, looking for rare insects. Approaching one burly miner the scientist exclaimed:

"Ha! Now I have him!"

"Hold on! No, you don't! Hands up!" cried the miner, and the next instant the little professor was gazing unflinchingly down the muzzle of a big revolver. "Don't you lay a hand on me!" went on the miner. "I've got the drop on you! Besides, you can't extradite me for a crime like that, anyhow. And, anyhow, I didn't do it!"

"Do it? Do what?" asked the professor mildly. "Will you please put down that gun. It's in my way, and I want to catch a new specimen of a blue spotted lizard I see crawling on your coat."

"A lizard!" gasped the man, as he lowered

his weapon. "Aren't you a sheriff, looking for me?"

"Not at all," said the professor, with a smile. "I am collecting specimens for my college museum. Ah, there! I have it—just a moment, if you please," and with a quick motion he captured the wriggling lizard in a little net, and transferred it to one of his glass boxes.

"Is—is that what you're after?" asked the man, backing away, while those near him laughed.

"That's all," said the professor, blandly.

"We're a scientific expedition," put in Jerry, thinking this a good time to explain the nature of the trip. "We are all with Professor Snodgrass, after specimens," but he did not say what kind, and, after all, the sixty nuggets were specimens of one sort.

"Huh!" ejaculated the man, as he put away his weapon. "I took you for a sheriff when you tackled me that way. It's a good thing you aren't, for I had the drop on you. But anyhow," he added quickly, "I didn't do anything. It was another fellow."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Mr. Snodgrass, as he made some notes about the blue spotted lizard. "And now can you tell me where I can find some luminous snakes?"

"Luminous snakes?" ejaculated the man. "Say, let me out of this. First it's blue lizards,



and now it's luminous snakes! I wonder if you're crazy, or I am," and he made his way through the throng.

The airship was now attracting much attention, and when Bob began preparing a meal in the galley the crowd was so great that they threatened to overturn the craft in their eagerness. So Jerry and his chums stretched a rope about the *Comet*, and after that they had more seclusion.

They did not intend to stay in Bolton long, merely to wait for the gale to subside, and to look over the craft for possible damage. None was in evidence, and, while Jerry was ascertaining this, Jim Nestor and Harvey Brill went about the town. They saw no one they knew, for which Mr. Brill was glad, as he did not want to have to answer embarrassing questions.

"And I don't see any of the grub-stakers, either," he said; "though some of 'em who got on my trail did hang out here."

It began to look as if they could start on their way to the Border, and their search for the golden valley, without being annoyed by men who would stop at nothing to accomplish their ends. As for Noddy Nixon and his cronies, nothing more had been seen of them.

"We'll start for the Border to-morrow," decided Jerry, after a day spent in Bolton, during which the professor got many new specimens.

The boys and the two men, in order to give color to their pretended characters, assisted the scientist in getting specimens, though Mr. Snodgrass laughed at the varieties they brought in.

"I have them all—every one," he said. "You must learn to look for new and rare kinds."

The people of Bolton were sorry to see our friends leave, but as the weather was now good, Jerry decided that it was useless to remain longer. Accordingly the *Comet* was sent aloft, and steered for the Canadian Border.

"Keep watch for your landmarks," Jerry cautioned the old prospector. "We'll go down when you spot one and see if we can trace the valley in that way."

"All right," was the answer.

They crossed the Border early that day, flying low enough to recognize the stone posts that in places marked the Northern limits of the United States, and the Southern line of Canada.

"We've got to work more to the East, to my way of thinking," said Mr. Brill, after several hours of coasting back and forth over the line. "The valley lies more to the East."

Jerry accordingly changed the rudder. They were proceeding along at a good rate of speed, when there came a sudden snapping sound and the *Comet* seemed to swing about almost in a circle.

"What is it?" cried Ned.

"Rudder control is broken!" cried Jerry. "We'll have to go down. Shut off the motor, Ned. Bob, start the gas machine!"

Below them was an almost unbroken wilderness, but Jerry managed to pick out a little clearing, and guided the craft to that as best he could.

As the *Comet* settled down, and the boys and their companions leaped out to see the extent of the damage, there was a commotion in the woods surrounding them. Then, to their surprise, there stalked into the little clearing a number of Indians, attired in their beads, feathers and blankets.

"Blackfeet!" exclaimed Harvey Brill, in a low voice. "They're a party of Blackfeet from the reservation! They must have taken French leave. Now there'll be trouble!"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### BEAR STEAKS

FOR a moment the two parties remained watching each other narrowly—on one side the whites, and on the other the Indians, who surrounded, and far outnumbered our friends. The redmen were wrapped in their blankets, and they did not show a weapon, though it could hardly be doubted but that, under the gaudy folds, they carried rifles surreptitiously obtained.

"What's best to do?" asked Jerry, in a low voice.

"Let's see what they're going to do, first," suggested Jim Nestor. "It's too bad we jumped out so suddenly, without even a pistol. And if we make a move to get 'em now it will only start the trouble all the sooner. If we can get along peaceably so much the better. I don't hanker for a fight."

The Blackfeet must have been wonderfully astonished to see such a strange craft descend so suddenly among them, but, with the characteristics of their race, they maintained a dignified

silence, save for a few grunts, and an occasional low-voiced remark.

"I guess they take us for visitors from the clouds," said Ned, in a half-whisper.

"I'm not so sure of that," replied Jim. "I shouldn't be surprised if some of them had seen an airship before."

"Where?" asked Bob, half incredulously.

"Why, sometimes the government gives permission to the Indians to go out in traveling Wild West shows, and often at the exhibitions there'll be an airship flight. Some of the Indians may have seen one, and come back to tell the others about it. In that case they wouldn't show much surprise. But, at the same time, if they had never seen one, and if we should suddenly sprout wings, and begin flying about ourselves, they wouldn't show any curiosity. It's part of their training, I guess."

But now, after the first shock of what must have been a surprise was over, the Indians seemed disposed to be friendly enough. They evidently saw that the party of whites was unarmed—at least they had no weapons in their hands, though the Indians did, as the boys and their friends could see when a breeze blew their blankets aside, disclosing the stocks of rifles held under the gay coverings.

One of the Blackfeet—evidently the leader—

approached the group of whites who stood in front of the airship, and, holding up his hand, with the palm outward, an almost universal sign of peace, gravely uttered one word:

"How!"

"How!" replied Harvey Brill, and then, to the no small surprise of the boys, the old miner began a string of guttural words that caused the faces of the Indians to light up. They were being addressed in their own tongue.

"I didn't know you could sling Blackfeet talk," said Jim, when his partner had finished.

"Oh, I'm not much good at it, but I can manage to carry on a little conversation. It's just as I expected, these chaps have left the reservation. They say they don't like it there—too small,—and they want to live freer. They're out for a good time."

"And does that mean trouble for us?" asked Jerry.

"Well, it may and it may not. The Indians have been cooped up for a long time, and they've lost much of their wildness. But it never all dies out, and, once they feel that they are free—even though they know they may be punished for what they do—they may go on a rampage again—just for fun, as they think."

"Then we've got to be careful," suggested Ned, who was eyeing the redmen with interest.

"We sure have. I've told 'em we're after bugs, and such like, but I don't know whether they believe it or not. There's one thing sure, they'll never bother him," and he pointed to Professor Snodgrass, who, totally oblivious to his surroundings, or any danger, was scurrying about, catching bugs and specimens in his little nets.

"Why not?" Bob wanted to know.

"Because they think he's a little crazy—touched in the head, you know. I heard some of 'em say so. The Indians—at least most of 'em—regard a crazy person as particularly under the protection of the Great Spirit, and they'll never harm one."

"Then maybe we can get the professor to protect us if worst comes to worst," suggested Ned.

"Oh, I don't imagine anything will happen right away," went on Harvey Brill. "They say they are going off to hunt and fish, and all they ask is to be let alone. That may be so, or it may not. Time will tell. I've told 'em we are flying about with the professor, and that we may disappear any moment."

"We can't until that rudder's fixed—worse luck," exclaimed Jerry. "We'll get right at it."

"Yes, I wouldn't delay any longer than I had to," spoke Jim Nestor. "Some of those fellows are rather savage looking. I wouldn't want to anger one if I didn't have a gun."

"Are they much surprised at the *Comet*?" asked Bob.

"They won't let on, if they are," replied the miner.

The leader of the Blackfeet now addressed Harvey Brill again, and, at the close of a short conversation, the redmen, without any further greetings, filed off in the woods.

"They say they're going to look for hunting and fishing grounds," said the miner. "I only hope they keep away."

"Well, let's have something to eat, anyhow!" exclaimed Bob, with a sigh of relief, as the last of the natives disappeared.

"That's Bob's remedy for every kind of trouble," cried Jerry, with a grin. "All right, Chunky. You get the grub and I'll see what I can do with this rudder."

Jerry found that it would take longer to fix than he anticipated, as he had to unship it.

"We'll be here three days, anyhow," he remarked.

"Then we might as well take it easy," decided Ned. "I wonder if we could do any hunting around here?"

"I saw signs of bear when I was here before," said Harvey Brill. "I shouldn't wonder but what you might get a pop at one if you struck a trail. I'll go along if you like. With those



Blackfeet roaming around these woods I don't like you to take chances alone."

"Then I'll stay here, and sort of keep on the watch in camp," said Jim, for they had made a camp in the place where the airship had descended.

"And don't let the professor wander too far away," cautioned Mr. Brill, as he and Ned prepared to go on a hunt.

"I'll have a good fire to cook any bear steaks, if you bring in any," said Bob. Jerry was left to labor over the rudder. He needed only such help as Bob or Jim Nestor could give.

Ned and Harvey Brill traveled on for some miles without getting any sign of game. Then the miner, who had been something of a hunter in his day, came to a sudden stop, and, pointing to the ground, said:

"There are the tracks, boy!"

"Bear?" asked Ned excitedly.

"That's what! And they're fresh, too!"

Cautiously they followed the trail, the tracks becoming more pronounced each minute. Finally, as they turned a rocky headland, they came to a little glade, and there, feeding on some berry bushes, they saw a large brown bear.

"Get him, boy!" exclaimed Harvey, generously giving up his chance. "His back is toward us, and the wind's blowing from him to us. Plug him right under the ear!"

Ned felt himself beginning to tremble, but he conquered the inclination, and raised his gun. The muzzle wavered a bit, but he managed to steady himself.

Suddenly the bear, as if some instinct warned him of the presence of enemies, raised his head and gave a loud "woof!" Instantly Ned fired, and to his delight he saw bruin give a convulsive leap into the air, and then whirl about, to fall a moment later.

But, before the animal reached the ground there was the report of another rifle at right angles to where our friends stood, and a puff of smoke told of the presence of another hunter.

"Someone else is after him!" exclaimed Harvey; "but you winged him first, Ned! Come on, he's dead I guess!"

Together they sprang forward, but they had hardly reached the carcass of the bear, which was twitching in the death tremor, before there stepped from the underbrush the Blackfoot Indian leader. He held a smoking rifle in his hand, and as he stalked forward he said with a scowl:

"Me shoot! That Indian bear!"

"Get out!" cried Mr. Brill. "Those are our bear steaks! We shot him first!"

"Indian bear!" said the warrior, fiercely; and, as he raised his hand, there came out from the bushes several of his followers.

## CHAPTER XIX

### ON GUARD

NED SLADE, who had started to run toward his quarry, all excited over killing the bear, stopped short at the sight of the party of redmen. Harvey Brill, too, was plainly at a loss over what to do.

"Indian bear!" repeated the leader of the Blackfeet. It seemed that he could speak some English, though previously he had talked only in his own guttural tongue. "Indian shoot—Indian bear," he said, again scowling at our friends. The other redmen gathered in a circle back of their chief, and now it was noticed that they made no pretense of having no arms—their rifles were plainly in evidence.

"Guess we're up against it, Mr. Brill," murmured Ned, as he raised his rifle, intending to pump another cartridge into the firing chamber, and eject the discharged shell.

"Don't!" suddenly exclaimed the Westerner, in a low but tense voice.

"Don't what?" asked Ned.

"Don't pump in another charge. This is a ticklish bit of work, Ned, and the least hostile act may make trouble. Don't load your gun, or some of theirs may happen to go off—accidental-like. Keep cool, and I'll see what can be done."

"But can he claim our bear—the bear I shot before he did? There's no doubt but that my bullet struck first, and the bear was almost down when he fired."

"That's right, my lad, but right doesn't always go in this country. They've got the numbers. Still, I'm not going to give in without a kick. Of course it's your bear, and a fine shot it was, too."

Mr. Brill looked narrowly at the Indian chief and his followers. The redmen maintained a dignified silence, seeming to prefer to leave it to their leader to settle the dispute.

"Indian bear!" exclaimed the chief again, and he took a step toward the carcass of bruin, as if to see what the two whites would do toward disputing his claim. "Indian bear!"

"So you said before, Standing Horse," remarked Harvey Brill, calmly. "I ought to know it by this time. I'm not deaf. Only I don't quite agree with you."

The miner, too, had dropped his jargon of Indian talk, and was speaking in English, since he saw that the redman used that tongue, though how perfectly was yet to be learned.

"Bah! White man heap smart—boys smart too. Come by eagle wings to get bear. Indian shoot first."

"That's not so, and you know it, Standing Horse!" exclaimed the miner, sharply. "We did come by eagle wings out to this country, and by that I suppose you mean our airship. But if you think we came here to be cheated out of our rights by you fellows, you've got another think coming!"

"Bah! White man think much—talk much," half sneered the redman.

"Well, I always say what I think, which is more than I can say about you, Standing Horse, and them that's with you," retorted Harvey Brill. "What makes you claim that bear as yours? This young man here—and he owns part of the eagle machine—he shot that bear as cleanly as I ever want to see one toppled over. He fired first, and it wasn't until after the brute was falling that you fired. Any of your men will say the same thing, too, if they want to tell the truth."

"Indian always have straight tongue!" murmured the chief, and some of his followers could be heard to mutter as they gathered closer about him.

"I wish they did!" snapped Mr. Brill. "But it's all nonsense for you to say that you killed the bear. It's ours and we mean to have it—not that

we actually need it, for I guess Bob has enough grub in his kitchen to last a month. But we want our rights, and we're going to have 'em!"

Mr. Brill spoke sharply, and it was evident that his words produced an effect on the Indians, for they murmured angrily, and seemed to be urging their chief to take some action.

"That Indian bear!" sullenly repeated Standing Horse.

"Well, if that's the way you feel about it, there's only one way to settle this dispute!" declared the miner. "Here, Ned, hold my gun!"

"What are you going to do?" asked the lad.

"I'm going to prove to this cheating Indian whose bullet it was that finished the bear. That's the only way. He's got an old-fashioned rifle, and it doesn't make half the size wound your soft-nosed mushroom bullet does. I'll show him!"

Passing his rifle to Ned, Mr. Brill stalked forward toward the body of the bear. At the first sign of his advance the angry murmur among the Indians increased, and the chief quickly shoved another cartridge into the chamber of his weapon.

"Look out!" cried Ned, in apprehension.

"It's all right," answered the miner, reassuringly. "I know these fellows. They won't fire until they're more angry than they are now, and especially when they see I haven't got a gun. Don't worry. I'll settle this thing!"

It seemed that he was right, for when the red-men saw that Harvey Brill had left his rifle with Ned, their murmurs subsided, and the chief lowered his gun.

"We'll decide this right now, Standing Horse," went on the Westerner. "I'll cut out the bullets and prove to you that I'm right, and that this young man killed the bear. Come on, now, be a sport and take part in this post mortem examination."

"White man sport—Indian sport!" said the chief, and, not to be outdone in "bluff," Standing Horse passed his rifle to one of his followers and joined Harvey at the dead bear.

The two stood for a moment over the carcass of bruin, as though each was waiting for the action of the other. Then Harvey motioned courteously for the Indian to proceed to cut out the bullets to satisfy himself.

"White man cut," spoke Standing Horse, briefly. It was a partial acknowledgment that he would play fair.

"All right, Indian," replied Harvey, drawing a hunting knife, with which he had armed himself on leaving the airship camp. "I'll do the cutting and I'll prove to you that you're in the wrong. There's nothing like being fair and right, you know. Here goes!"

It did not take long to extract the bullet fired

from the rifle of Standing Horse. It had not penetrated deeply, and, while in a spot that might have caused death from bleeding in time, it was not necessarily vital.

To get Ned's missile, however, was a harder task, and Harvey had to cut deeply before he found it. Then he located it so near the heart that the organ itself was injured. Ned had aimed high, but his gun must have dropped as he pulled the trigger, for the bullet went in back of the right shoulder, taking a diagonal course and almost passing through the body of the beast. The motor boy's gun was a high-powered one, and the bullet, mushrooming, or spreading out, had inflicted a deadly wound.

"There, you see!" exclaimed Harvey, triumphantly as he laid the two missiles side by side on the ground. "White boy's bear!"

For a moment Standing Horse did not reply. Then he grunted out:

"White man speak with straight tongue. Indian no say what not so. Indian——"

"I know," interrupted Harvey, with a laugh. "You want to say you were mistaken, that's all. Go ahead, no hard feelings, only I knew I could prove it was our bear, and I want my rights, even if you are on the warpath."

"Bah!" grunted the redman again, as he turned to go back to his followers. Evidently



they had seen how the dispute had ended. They were not to get the bear, and they were disappointed for doubtless, since leaving, they missed the rations given out at their reservation which they had deserted. In all probability they were hungry, and the bear meant a feast to them, even though the meat was not at its best. Harvey Brill must have known this, for ere Standing Horse could join the group of redmen, and secure his rifle from the Indian who held it, the Westerner called out:

"Hold on, Standing Horse. Just because I proved that this was our bear meat doesn't say we want it all. There's more here than we can use, and, after we take off a few steaks you're welcome to the rest. Indians can have most of the bear."

"Ya! Ya!" grunted the chief, evidently in surprised delight. And then, with his customary disinclination to showing any emotion, the chief motioned to his followers the further result of the dispute. The redmen could not restrain a murmur of delight, which showed their hunger. Pleased smiles took the place of scowls, and Ned breathed in relief, for he feared there might be hostilities.

"I guess this will do us," remarked Harvey, as he cut off some of the best portions. "Take the rest, Standing Horse."

The Indians needed no second invitation, and soon were at work cutting up the bear. Others began making a fire, while Standing Horse, taking his rifle from the warrior who had held it, stalked off by himself in gloomy silence.

"Come on, Ned," suggested the miner, as he reached our hero, carrying the steaks, "I guess we've done enough hunting for one day. Besides, I want to get back to the others."

"Why?" asked the lad, struck by something unusual in the tone of the miner.

"Oh—I—er—well, I just want to tell 'em what happened. They may be anxious about us." But Ned knew Harvey Brill had some other reason.

Jerry, Bob and Jim Nestor were greatly surprised on the return of the hunters, and more so when they heard the story. As for Professor Snodgrass, nothing seemed to worry him. He went on collecting his bugs, classifying them and making notes about them, as if nothing had happened.

"Don't go too far away," advised Mr. Brill to the little scientist, when the latter was about to start out again after hearing the story of the bear.

"Why not?" mildly inquired Mr. Snodgrass.

"Because I don't altogether like the way those Indians acted," was the reply.

"But don't you think they were satisfied with the way you settled the dispute about the bear?" asked Jerry.

"Oh, yes, fairly so—as much as any hungry Indians could be satisfied. But those fellows are looking for trouble. They didn't leave the reservation for fun, and they will be up to mischief sooner or later."

"That's right," agreed Jim Nestor.

"Then what had we better do?" asked Jerry. "I can't get the rudder in shape for another day or two. I've got to make a whole new part. We'll have to stay here, for if we went up we'd just drift helplessly about. Is there any danger?"

"Well, I wouldn't like to say there was," answered Mr. Brill, slowly; "and yet I'm not so foolish as to say there isn't. Those bucks are hungry, and a hungry Indian will do more than one that has had a good meal. Then, too, they know we've got lots of things aboard here that they'd like. Of course they may not get up spunk enough to attack us, and then, again, they may."

"Then you think we'd better keep close around here?" asked Bob, pausing with a pan in his hand. He had been in the act of getting a meal when Ned and Harvey Brill returned.

"I think so—yes," replied the miner. "And

I think we had better stand on guard, too—night and day. It won't do to take chances. Jim, you and I'll take turns watching for these beggars while the boys get the airship in shape to run. The sooner we leave these diggings the better I'll like it. I'll take first watch," and, seeing that his rifle was fully loaded, the Westerner stalked off a little way in the woods to take up his position on a slight eminence that gave him a good view of the surrounding country.

## CHAPTER XX

### A NIGHT ATTACK

"WELL, this is our first bit of bad luck," remarked Ned, when the prospector had gone off to do guard duty. "But I suppose we couldn't expect to have everything too easy."

"No, that's right," agreed Jerry. "Well, now it's up to us to get busy and make these repairs as soon as we can. If the Indians want to make trouble they will, and the best thing for us to do is to get out of here."

"I don't call it all bad luck," observed Bob, as he started back to the galley, whence came appetizing smells.

"What part isn't?" asked Ned.

"Getting the bear steaks was good luck. I'm going to broil 'em, and we'll——"

"Well, you are the limit, Chunky!" exclaimed Jerry. "You can't see any bad luck in anything, as long as there are eats connected with it; eh, Ned?"

"That's right. Well, I am glad that I shot the bear. He was a big fellow, and if the skin

had been in prime condition I think I'd have tried to make a bargain with the Indians for it. But it's too late now."

"Don't have any more to do with the beggars than you have to," advised Jim Nestor. "Everything may come out all right yet. Can I help you boys any?"

"Yes, you can," said Jerry, in a low voice. "But not by working on the rudder—we can attend to that. If you keep an eye on Professor Snodgrass, though, you'll be doing well. I think he'll wander off too far looking for specimens, in spite of what Harvey said. Just sort of watch over him; will you? He'll get so interested chasing after a one-legged bumble bee that he won't realize how far from camp he's going."

"That's right—I will," agreed Mr. Nestor, and he strolled along the path taken by the scientist, who, intent on capturing a new kind of butterfly, paid no attention to anything else.

Bob had disappeared into the galley, where he could be heard whistling and singing by turns as he prepared the meal.

"Chunky is in his element now," observed Jerry, with a laugh.

"He sure is," came from Ned. "What can I do, Jerry?"

"Well, you might be making the braces for

the new rudder; I have it nearly finished, but I'm going to rig the controls a little differently. I want to make them stronger, so that in case of a hard blow, straining on them won't break 'em, as it did a little while ago. If we work fast we may be able to leave to-morrow."

"I hope so," murmured Ned. "I want to see the color of those sixty nuggets."

"And the longer we delay," said Jerry, "the better chance Noddy Nixon and his crowd have of getting there ahead of us."

"Do you really think they're after the gold?"

"I don't doubt it in the least. I think all they wanted was to get an idea of the general direction in which the valley was. Now they'll prospect about, join forces with the grub-stakers, and try to find it. So we don't want to lose any time."

Ned and his tall chum were soon busily engaged on the rudder. It was no easy task, and several times Jerry feared it would take at least two days more to make the repairs.

"And I don't want to spend more than one night here if I can help it," he murmured. "Not with those Indians roaming the woods."

Bob served the bear steaks, and they all agreed that they made a tasty meal. Professor Snodgrass even consented to give up his bug-collecting long enough to partake of some.

Jim Nestor relieved Harvey Brill at standing guard, but, when night fell, it was decided that instead of staying in the open, and building a campfire, the watch would be kept from within the airship.

"We can take turns in the pilot house," said Jerry, "and I can mount the search lamp on top of it, so it can be swung in a circle all about, being worked from inside. By keeping it on the move it will flash all around the *Comet* at intervals, and the one on watch can spot the Indians if they try to attack us."

"That's all right, as far as it goes," declared Jim; "but the trouble is that the woods are so thick, and come so close up to us, that we can't see the Indians until the last minute. But it's the best we can do."

"It's better than nothing," asserted the other Westerner. "Maybe I'm over cautious expecting trouble, but it's best to be on the safe side. It's better to be sure than sorry. Those red-men, even though I did give 'em most of the bear, may feel that they have been cheated, though it was Ned's bullet that did the killing. They may persuade the chief to lead the attack. So we'll just stand guard all night."

"We can do some work on the rudder to-night, too," decided Jerry, "and that will fix things so we can surely get off to-morrow."



Accordingly, he and Ned labored away after supper inside the airship, while the professor classified his day's catch of bugs, and Jim and Harvey took turns in the pilot house, the great searchlight flashing the finger of fire on the dark trees.

"There, this is all we can do until we can go outside and attach it, to see how to rig the controls," announced Jerry, at ten o'clock. "Now, how about turning in?"

"You and Ned get some rest," proposed Jim. "We can take the early watches, and you can relieve us after you've had some sleep."

"I want to do my share," put in Bob.

"You shall," promised the mine foreman.

It fell to Bob's lot to take the last morning trick. At three o'clock he took his place in the pilot house, Jerry and Ned having stood two hours each. It would be daylight shortly after five, and then the danger would not be so great.

"If they come at all, it will be just before dawn," Jim Nestor had said. "But they may not come. I haven't seen a sign of 'em, and I've been watching carefully. That searchlight is a great stunt. It makes the woods as bright as day; though, as I said, I wish we had a wider circle of clearing around us. Keep your eyes peeled, Bob."

The stout lad promised, and took his position.

At first he followed the circle of the light zealously, as it moved about, being operated by a small motor that sent it revolving on a cogged base. Then, as he saw nothing but the leafy shadow of the trees, he became less nervous, and took his task more comfortably.

Bob was a hearty eater, and, just before coming on watch he had partaken of a lunch, though it was night. And, as is well known, a hearty meal often makes one sleepy. It was so in Bob's case.

At first he felt only drowsy. Then he felt his head nodding from time to time. Once he even dozed for a moment.

"Come! This won't do!" he exclaimed. "I believe I'm getting sleepy. Guess I'll get a drink of water."

As he arose to leave the pilot house, he gave a look once more all around the little clearing, lighted by the flashing light. He could see nothing.

But scarcely had Bob reached the water cooler, and raised the glass to his lips, then, from the surrounding forest, arose a chorus of shrill yells—cries that sent a cold shiver down his spine, and seemed to stop the beating of his heart.

"Indians!" he yelled. "The Blackfeet! They're attacking us! Wake up, everybody!"

## CHAPTER XXI

### INTO THE DEPTHS

**"WHAT's that?"**

**"Where's my gun?"**

**"Get ready, everybody!"**

**"Turn on all the lights!"**

These were only a few of the shouts that greeted Bob's cry of warning. It was Jerry who thought to switch on the incandescents, illuminating the interior of the motorship, which had hitherto been in darkness. Every member of the party, save Bob, had fallen into a weary slumber.

The two Westerners, from long habit, had reached out for their weapons on the instant of opening their eyes, but the boys were not so trained. True, Bob had a gun, but he had left it in the pilot house when he went for a drink of water.

The yells of the Indians outside increased. Very likely, since they might have raised their voices in shouts at some Wild West show, with which they may have been connected, this was the first time, in many years, that they had given vent to the warwhoop; save perhaps in some tribal

ceremonies. But now they were using their lungs to their full power.

"Come on!" cried Bob, in desperation. "We've got to fight 'em!" He was not a little worried lest his slight dereliction from duty should be held to be responsible for the surprise. But he need not have alarmed himself, since it was likely that no one could have seen the red-men sneak up amid that dense growth of forest.

"Hark!" cried Jim Nestor, as he sprang out of his bunk, with ready gun.

The airship seemed to vibrate to several thuds.

"They're boarding us!" exclaimed Jerry.

"And they're not firing a shot!" came from Harvey Brill. "Boys, I see what this means! They're trying to scare us, but they haven't got nerve enough to use their guns. Maybe this is only part of the band, that has sneaked off without the chief knowing it, to get what they can from us. Come on! We'll give 'em a warm reception!"

He leaped to a window, flung it open and began discharging his weapon, taking care to aim in the air so as not to hit any of the Indians by accident. Yells greeted the shot from his rifle, but Mr. Brill knew what he was doing, and felt sure he had hit no one.

"That's the way!" yelled Jim Nestor. "Maybe we can scare 'em off!"

He, too, began firing, an example followed by Bob and Ned. The yelling increased in intensity, and the thuds on the deck of the *Comet* continued, showing that more of the savages were climbing over the rail, which offered a slight obstacle.

Suddenly the door of the cabin was pushed open, and one of the blanketed braves leaped in. He had no weapon, but, seeing some shining tools that Ned and Jerry had been using on the rudder that day, he made a grab for them, evidently thinking them of great value.

"Hi! Drop those!" yelled Jerry.

"Indian take!" grunted the redman, as he rushed out again.

"There's a score of 'em!" cried Harvey Brill, as he looked out and saw the Indians in the glare of the searchlight. "Oh, if we could only get out of this! We don't want to hurt any of 'em, for it will mean trouble, and yet we can't let 'em strip us! Can we go up, Jerry!"

"Yes!" cried the tall lad. "We'll take a chance. There's no wind, and we can manage without the rudder. We'll go up as a balloon! Ned—Bob! Start the gas machine!"

The two lads, dropping their guns, rushed to the engine room. Jerry hurried to the pilot house where he saw that all was in readiness for a quick flight. For, though the *Comet* could not

ascend as an aeroplane, owing to the broken rudder, it could still rise as a balloon.

The two Westerners were rapidly firing their rifles, taking care to aim high, hoping to intimidate the Indians by the seeming danger. And, in a measure, they succeeded. Several of the redmen leaped off the motorship, and disappeared in the woods. Others, more bold, laid hands on whatever they could find in the half-darkness out on deck, and ran off. Still others penetrated to the interior of the craft. But not one had a weapon. This the boys thought very strange until later they learned that Chief Standing Horse, fearing that some of his followers might try to take revenge on the whites for the bear incident, had confiscated the arms of the younger members of his party, giving them in charge of the older, and more trusted warriors of his tribe.

"Are you ready, Ned?" called Jerry to his chum.

"All right," was the answer.

"Then start her going, and we'll go up!"

It was just beginning to get daylight when there came a tremor through the whole length of the *Comet*. Jerry had cast off the anchor ropes, and as the powerful gas filled the bag she tore loose from the earth and shot upward.

There was a cry of surprise and terror from

the Indians still aboard, and the rapid running of feet across the deck told of a rush to leap off before the craft went too high.

As it was, several had to drop off from a considerable distance, and in the dawn of the morning our friends saw many of the Indians limping into the forest.

"I guess we've taught them a lesson," remarked Jerry, when the motorship was clear of the earth, and the last Indian had dropped off.

"That's right!" chimed in Ned, who had kept the gas machine going at full capacity. "They got a lot of stuff that we may need, but we're lucky even so."

"They didn't get into the kitchen!" exclaimed Bob, proudly. "I had a lot of pies there, and if they'd taken them——"

"Oh, for cats' sake, Chunky!" cried Jerry. "Is that all you can think of now?"

"Well, why not?" asked the stout lad. "We're all right; aren't we?"

And they were, when they came to take an account of themselves. Little damage had been done to the craft, and only a few articles were missing. They were now well up in the air, drifting along before a gentle wind.

"We'll drift along until we see a good place to land, and then we'll go down," said Jerry.

"Not near here, though," stipulated Jim Nestor.

"Well, I guess not!" exclaimed Ned.

Luckily they were able to land in a large clearing, many miles from where the Indians had attacked them, and, as they were now over the Canadian border—a fact ascertained by seeing some boundary pillars as they crossed—they had no further fear of the Blackfeet.

"But it was a hot time while it lasted," said Bob, who explained how the attack had come about.

Breakfast was served, and then the motor boys proceeded to finish work on the rudder. Professor Snodgrass, who had taken no part in the repulse of the Indians, save to gather his books and specimen boxes in readiness for instant flight, resumed his collecting.

The two Westerners devoted themselves to making a tour of the surrounding country, to look for possible hostile signs, but found none. Then they managed to get some small game for Bob to cook.

The rudder repairs were finished that day, and a test of the *Comet* showed it to be under perfect control.

"Now for the valley of the sixty nuggets of gold!" cried Jerry, when they were ready to start off again.

For two days they circled about, looking for some landmark that would indicate to Mr. Brill the beginning of the big earth gash where he had



hidden his wealth. They saw, one evening, a fantastically piled mound of red rock that showed plainly even from a great height.

"There it is!" cried the prospector. "The valley begins right there!"

"Then we'll go down, and camp for to-night," decided Jerry, "and in the morning we'll make the descent."

The morning dawned, clear and beautiful. After an early breakfast they went aloft in the *Comet*, which could now be guided better than ever.

"That's the valley!" cried Harvey Brill, as they got above the depths. "Now to see if I can find my gold after the landslide!"

It was a wild and desolate gash in the earth—a great valley in the midst of towering mountain peaks. In very truth nothing but an airship or a balloon could have entered it as it was now.

"Well, here we go, boys!" said Jerry, a trifle solemnly, as he tilted the deflecting rudder.

All about them were rugged peaks, some snow-capped, others, not so high, covered with a dense forest growth. Below them lay the mysterious and silent valley that hid the wealth of gold.

Would they find it?

Everyone asked himself that question as the *Comet* descended into the depths.

## CHAPTER XXII

### A DISAPPOINTED PROFESSOR

WILD and desolate indeed, was the scene upon which those in the motorship gazed as their craft sank into the valley on the Canadian Border. Located in the midst of a vast mountain range, the great gash in the earth looked as if a giant had, with some titanic shavel, scooped out earth and rocks to make a vast bed for himself. The valley, located well up in the midst of the mountains, extended north and south for many miles. In fact it lay directly across the Border, so that about half of it was in Canada and the other half in the United States.

The boys and their companions had noticed some of the boundary marks just before they began their descent, and they could easily determine their position.

"Think you can make a landing, Jerry?" asked Jim Nestor, as he stood beside the tall lad in the pilot house. "It's pretty rough down there."

"Oh, I can land all right," asserted Jerry. "I can manipulate the *Comet* to make her go almost

anywhere, and we don't need a very large smooth place to anchor her. But it sure is all mixed up."

"I should say so!" exclaimed Ned.

"Looks as if some one stood up on the tops of the mountains and threw big rocks down here," commented Bob, who had come from the kitchen, where supper was in course of preparation.

And indeed Bob's description was as accurate as any. The floor of the long, but narrow, valley was covered with great rocks and boulders, some of them of vari-colored sandstone, and others of hard, and almost black, granite. Some were of odd shapes, and they differed in size from those almost as large as a house, to mere rocks that a lad could have tossed.

"That happened when the landslide came down," explained Mr. Brill. "If you'd been here then you would have thought the earth was coming to an end. I never heard such a racket, and the way the rocks and earth tumbled down here was a caution. I just got out in time. If I hadn't I might be here yet—but not alive."

From what little view the gold-seekers had of the valley in the gathering darkness it did seem almost impossible of ascent or descent by ordinary means. It was not that the sides were so steep—though they were anything but of gentle slope—but the rugged walls, with here and there sheer

precipices, made them out of the question to scale.

"Nothing but a balloon could get down here," said Mr. Brill. "A balloon or an airship. It was a good thing you thought of these boys, Jim, or we'd never have had a chance for the gold. I don't believe anyone else could get into this valley; or, if they could, they couldn't get out again."

This was not exactly so, as they learned later. For when they had been in the valley some time, and were prepared to leave, they discovered, away up on the Canadian side, a comparatively easy descent. But it was so hidden, and in such an out-of-the-way place that only by the merest accident was it located.

"We can't do much gold seeking to-night," said Jerry, as he guided the aircraft to a comparatively level spot where he intended to anchor her. "It's getting darker every minute, and it doesn't look very inviting to go traveling around among those rocks, not knowing what moment they may come rolling down on you."

"That's right," agreed the man who had hidden the gold. "We'll wait until morning. Anyhow, I don't believe I'd be able to pick out the landmarks by which I'll have to be guided to the *cache*. I'll need daylight for that. You see, after I found out that I was being spied upon, I made several bluffs at hiding the gold. That is, I pretended to put it in two or three different

places. But it's all hidden in one spot, and I'll locate that to-morrow."

"Then we'll dig up the gold, and spend a few days hunting before we go back East," said Ned.

"Maybe it won't be as easy finding it as you think," put in Bob.

"Oh, I think I can walk right to it, when we get near enough," asserted the miner; "but it's several miles from here—more in the center of the valley."

"Well, there's one comfort," said Jim Nestor. "We won't be troubled by the Blackfeet to-night."

"No, but we may be troubled by *cold* feet!" exclaimed Ned, with a chuckle. "It's getting chilly. I guess we'll have to start the furnace to-night, Jerry."

It was quite cold up among the mountains, even though they were almost at the bottom of a deep valley, and the tall young pilot closed the windows of the airship.

"We can start the electric heaters," he said, for the *Comet* was equipped with all the latest improvements in the way of comforts. "Bob, turn 'em on when you go back to finish supper."

"That's so! I forgot about that cake!" cried the stout lad, as he made a dash for the galley. "I left it in the oven, and it smells as if it was burning!"

"Cake! He's the limit!" cried Ned. "He'd make some kind of pastry, or desert, if he had to use crackers and water, and we were eating our last meal. I never saw such a chap for grub!"

"Let him alone," suggested Jerry, good-naturedly. "He means all right."

"That looks like a good place to land," suggested Jim Nestor, a little later, as the airship approached a spot comparatively free from boulders.

"I'll try it," agreed Jerry, and a few minutes afterward the motorship was safely anchored, while night settled down over the mysterious valley.

Bob's fear for the cake proved unfounded, and the dainty came to the supper table, shortly afterward, in perfect condition. With the airship closed up, and the electric heaters going, the gold-seekers were very comfortable.

They sat about after the meal, talking over what lay before them. It seemed that they were almost at the end of their quest, though they realized that danger and uncertainty might beset them. Professor Snodgrass had about finished making notes of the specimens thus far captured. Placing away his books and boxes, he put on his hat, stretched himself, and started for the door of the cabin.

"Where are you going?" asked Jerry.

"To look for those luminous snakes," was the answer. "It is good and dark now, and I can see them well. Now that we are in the valley where they exist I must lose no time in securing some specimens."

"I wish you'd wait until morning," requested the tall lad. "We don't know anything of this valley, and, if you go prospecting around it in the dark, something may happen. Besides, there may be wild beasts here."

"All the better!" exclaimed the professor. "I can get more specimens!"

Jerry was unable to persuade Uriah Snodgrass to stay in, but, as a compromise, the scientist consented to take Harvey Brill and Ned with him, while the others made everything snug for the night.

But Mr. Snodgrass was doomed to disappointment, for though he and the others searched all around, within a radius of half a mile of the aircraft, no luminous snakes were discovered.

"Do you think they can all have vanished?" asked Mr. Snodgrass of the miner.

"Oh, no, for there were lots of them that I saw. But I can't just say it was here that I noticed them. It may have been farther up or down the valley. Besides, I wasn't paying much attention to such critters. I wanted to fool the

grub-stakers who were on my trail, and hide my gold."

"Oh, what was gold compared to the luminous snakes?" demanded the scientist. "If I had had your chance I would never have let it slip. Think of being able to present a luminous snake to a museum!"

"I'd rather get my sixty nuggets," murmured the miner as, with the disappointed professor, he returned to the aircraft.



## CHAPTER XXIII

### WATCHED

"HEY, fellows, get up! I've got hot coffee ready for you, and we'll start right out!"

"For cats' sake, who's that?" demanded the sleepy voice of Ned.

"Oh, you needn't ask," murmured Jerry. "It's Bob, of course, though how he managed to get up so early is one of the mysteries."

"Come on!" cried Bob, as he banged on the doors of the sleeping rooms of his chums. "We're going to get that gold to-day."

"Oh, so that's the game," said Jerry, "Bob is hot on the treasure hunt! Well, I suppose we had better get started."

"That's right," agreed Ned, as he leaped out from amid the bedclothes.

It was the morning after their first night spent in the gold valley, and the sun had arisen without anything of moment having occurred during the darkness. They had not felt the necessity of maintaining a watch, and, as it proved, there was no need of one. In the desolate valley they were

not disturbed. There was scarcely any wind to sway the anchored airship.

Bob was as good as his promise. He not only had hot coffee ready, but bacon and eggs, toasted crackers—for bread was difficult to bake and hard to keep fresh—and other things that invited hungry appetites.

“Well, now what’s the programme?” asked Ned, when the meal was over.

“I’m going to look for the luminous snakes!” exclaimed Professor Snodgrass, as he hurriedly jumped up to capture a new kind of fly that had buzzed in through the open window. “The rest of you can look for the gold if you like.”

“Well, I guess there’s no reason for any more disguise work,” spoke Jerry. “We’ve left the Blackfeet Indians behind, the grub-stakers don’t appear to have followed us, and we seem to have left Noddy Nixon and his crew in the lurch. So, if the professor wants to go off by himself for specimens, I guess he can, while we try to locate where the gold is hidden.”

That seemed to satisfy them all, and they turned to Harvey Brill, on whom would fall the burden of locating the hidden nuggets of gold.

“If we can get in the airship, and move along slowly, not too high up, I think I can pick out the landmark that will tell me where I made the *cache*,” said the miner. “It’s near a big rock

that looks like a church, as much as anything—it has a regular steeple.”

“Well, I don’t see why we can’t do that,” returned Jerry. “I can run the airship along as near to the ground as we like, by putting just a small charge of gas in the bag, so she won’t rise too high. It will be easier than walking the length of this valley, with all the rocks around.”

“But I can’t see the snakes, unless I’m right on the ground,” objected the professor.

“I was thinking of that,” went on the tall lad. “You can walk, if you like. We can leave you some food and water, and you can prospect as much as you please, just where you like. When you want us to come back and pick you up, just raise this flag as a signal, on a pole,” and Jerry produced a red cloth that could be picked out at some distance. “Then we’ll run the airship back and get you,” he concluded.

“And the snakes, too!” exclaimed the professor. “Don’t forget them. I’m bound to secure those specimens!”

“I hope you do,” murmured Ned; “and I hope we get the gold.”

“We’ll just have to!” exclaimed Bob. “If not the sixty nuggets, then some other, for the folks back home are sort of banking on us, and we can’t disappoint ’em after they’ve invested their money in the chance.”

"That's right!" exclaimed Harvey Brill. "Oh, I'm going to make good, or I'll go off grub-staking again and discover another pocket of gold. I won't see your folks done out of their money!" He seemed to feel his responsibility.

Professor Snodgrass began getting his apparatus ready for catching alive the luminous snakes, and it was arranged to take him a little way up the valley in the motorship, leave him, and then proceed on the gold hunt.

The gas machine was set going, and with only enough of the powerful vapor in the big bag to lift the craft above the highest of the big rocks that were strewn over the valley, they set off. Professor Snodgrass alighted about two miles from their first camping place, and at once began an eager search for new specimens. Then the others went slowly on.

"A rock that looks like a church; eh?" mused Ned, who had replaced Jerry at the steering wheels. "Well, there are all sorts and shapes of rocks here, you can take your choice."

"I picked out that one," explained the miner, "as I thought it was so big that nothing would ever move it. I hid the gold in a sort of stone pocket at the foot of it."

Eagerly they peered about for a sight of the great stone that would mark the hiding place of the nuggets. Mr. Brill had a general idea of

where he had *cached* his fortune, and said they would not reach it much before passing the center of the valley.

"But we'd better take no chances," he added; "for the landslide may have shifted things so that I'd pass over the spot before I knew it. So go slow, and we'll look all along the way."

Several times he thought he saw, in the distance, the big "church-rock" of which they were in search, and the airship would be sent to it, only to disappoint the searchers. For, when they got nearer the boulder, its form would change.

"That isn't it," Harvey Brill would say, and they would start off again.

This was kept up for some time, but shortly after dinner, when they were skimming along just above the surface, the old miner uttered a cry:

"There it is! I'm sure of it!" he exclaimed. "I'm not fooled this time! There's the rock landmark!"

Indeed, about a mile off was a great pile of stones that bore a strong resemblance to a church. There was even a slender steeple.

"That looks like it," admitted Jerry, who had again gone to the steering tower. "We'll drop down there and have a look."

A nearer view only served to confirm Mr. Brill in his belief, and, as they alighted from the

airship, he fairly ran to the foot of the great rock, and began looking about.

"I'm pretty sure this is the place," he said, but the boys noticed that his voice was not as confident as it had been. "We'll just dig a bit around here," he went on. "It may be that the rains have washed dirt over the *cache*."

"I'll do the digging," volunteered Jim Nestor, who had a pick and shovel, and soon he was making the rocks and dirt scatter, while the others looked on eagerly. Mr. Brill seemed a bit puzzled, however, and from time to time gazed off across the valley, as if to make sure this, and none other, was the rock he sought.

Suddenly Bob, who was thinking of returning to the airship for a sandwich, uttered a cry, and pointed to a cliff that towered above their heads—one of the upper boundaries of the valley.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "We're being spied upon!"

They all glanced to where he pointed, and there, boldly outlined against the sky, they saw a number of figures looking down on them—watching them.

"Blackfeet!" cried Ned.

"They're not Indians!" asserted Jim Nestor.

"Then it's Noddy Nixon and his crowd!" declared Jerry. "They have managed to trail us!"

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE LUMINOUS SNAKES

**"GET the guns!"**

It was Harvey Brill who exclaimed this, as he darted for the motorship. But Jim Nestor laid a restraining hand on his partner's arm.

"Now, hold on," suggested the mine foreman, in easy tones. "This is no time for shooting irons. I'm opposed to 'em on general principles, anyhow. There's very few times when you need 'em. We can attend to those fellows all right without getting down to desperate measures."

"But I'm not going to have 'em take that gold from me!" exclaimed the miner, fiercely.

"No danger," said Jim, easily. "They're quite a way off, and they're going to have their own troubles getting down to us. Besides, we haven't found the gold ourselves yet."

"Well, maybe that's so," admitted the miner, calming down somewhat. "What had we better do?"

"Try and discover exactly what they're doing," decided Jerry, promptly. "Ned, get the

glasses from the pilot house, and we'll take a look at 'em!"

In a few moments the tall lad was peering sharply at the party high up on the cliffs. So far away were they that they looked like small children, and only the fact that they did not present the characteristics of Indians led to the assumption that they were Noddy Nixon's companions and himself.

"It's them, all right!" announced Jerry, after a moment. "And they're looking at us with spy glasses. I guess they think they can see us when we find the gold."

"Well, as long as they don't come down I won't worry so much," spoke Mr. Brill. "But as for finding the gold here we're not going to do it."

"Why not?" asked Jerry and Ned together, in alarm. Bob had gone to the airship galley to see about the meal.

"Because, after all, this isn't the place," said the miner. "I've made a mistake. It was coming down the valley the other way that I spotted the rock that looks like a church, and there I hid the gold. Coming toward this rock from the opposite direction did make it look like the same one. But now, when I get a different view of it, I see that it isn't the place. We'll have to hunt again."



"Then we'll have to go up to the other end of the valley, and start from there," decided Jerry. "We can get the right view of the rock then."

"It's the only way, I guess," agreed the miner.

"And there's no more use digging here," came from Jim Nestor, as he took up the pick and shovel and started toward the airship. "It'll fool those fellows," and he chuckled as he waved his hand toward the group on the cliff above them.

"They seem some put out," observed Ned, who was looking at Noddy and his cronies through the glasses. "They're holding a conference, I guess."

"What about the professor?" asked Mr. Brill, as they all left the big rock. "If we're going to the other end of the valley do we want to leave him near here?"

"No, we'd better pick him up," agreed Jerry.

"Let's have dinner first," suggested Bob. "I've got it almost ready."

"That's right, Chunky; don't let anything interfere with the meals," laughed Jerry.

Another look at the place on the cliff where the spies had been, showed that they had vanished. Probably they had observed that they were being looked at with glasses, and did not want to betray their movements too much.

"I wonder what they're up to?" said Ned.

"After the gold, of course," came from Mr. Brill. "But they'll have a fight before they get it. I think I saw some of the grub-stakers in the bunch," he added, for he had gazed long and earnestly at those on the cliff.

"And maybe we'll have trouble before we get the nuggets," put in Jim Nestor. "If you can be mistaken once on your landmarks, Harvey, you may be again. And this valley seems to be full of queer-shaped rocks."

"It is," assented the miner; "but once we start down it from the other direction I know I can pick out the place where I buried the nuggets. I'll get 'em!"

"I hope so," murmured Ned, for he knew his father had placed much confidence in the efforts of himself and his chums.

"Now to pick up the professor," announced Jerry, when the meal was over, and the airship ready to proceed. A look at the cliff showed no signs of the spies, though all realized that they might be down behind rocks, peering at the gold-seekers, and so hidden as to be out of sight even of the powerful glasses.

The *Comet* sailed back down the valley, keeping but a short distance above the tallest peaks, or groups of boulders.

"Look for the red flag," counseled Jerry.

"I told the professor to hoist it on a pole to guide us to him."

"And he's just as likely to take it and make some sort of snake trap of it, as he is to hoist it," said Ned. "In fact I doubt if even he remembers to put it up, he'll be so much taken up with looking for the snakes."

As they neared the place where they had left the scientist they all looked down for a sight of him, but they saw no red flag, nor did they glimpse the little figure of the collector.

"He must be back of some rocks," said Bob. They were drifting along now, before a gentle wind, and the motor was shut off. Moving as a balloon, and guided only by the breeze they made not a sound.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a cry.

"Help! Help!" shouted a voice. "Help! I've got the snakes, but I'm caught and they may get away! Help!"

"The professor!" shouted Ned.

"And a snake has him!" added Bob.

"It can't be," declared Harvey Brill. "The luminous snakes are only little things. They couldn't hurt a cat."

But again came the cry:

"Help! Help! Help me save the luminous snakes!"

"He must have 'em!" declared Jim Nestor.



LYING AT FULL LENGTH ON THE GROUND, WAS  
PROFESSOR SNODGRASS.



The airship drifted around a pile of rocks, and there, lying at full length on the ground, his foot caught under a big stone, was Professor Snodgrass. In either hand he held a wriggling serpent.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE HIDDEN MAN

"SOMEONE has attacked him!" cried Ned.

"Maybe it was Noddy Nixon and his crowd," added Bob. "Quick, Jerry! Let's help him."

"I'm getting there as fast as I can," replied the tall lad. "But I don't believe any one has attacked him. He's all alone."

"He's hurt, anyhow," declared Jim Nestor.

"His foot is caught," added Mr. Brill. "I guess he must have stepped on a loose rock, and it rolled over on him, pinning him fast. I hope his leg isn't broken."

"Help! Help!" cried the professor again. "Get the snakes for me! They're wriggling loose! I can't hold 'em much longer!"

"They are slippery customers, I guess," asserted Jim, grimly.

A moment later Jerry brought the airship to a stop, not far from where the scientist was held a prisoner by the stone. All together they leaped out and ran to his relief.

Jerry and Ned started to roll away the stone, while Bob, Jim and Harvey began to lift the professor's head and shoulders.

"Don't!" he begged them. "Let me alone. I'm all right. Just take these two luminous snakes from me, and put 'em in a box. There's another one, and maybe more in a hole back there. I must get them. But don't mind me. I can wait. Save the snakes!"

"Isn't he the limit!" exclaimed Jim Nestor, as he turned his attention to the wriggling serpents, which the professor still held—one in each hand. As Mr. Brill had said they were small, and not to be feared unless their bite was poisonous, and this did not seem to be so.

"Put 'em in boxes!" called the professor. "You'll find some over there," and he nodded his head toward the left. Jerry saw some of the glass-topped specimen cases which the scientist used, and ran for them.

"Get the snakes, boys!" the tall lad called to Ned and Bob, and, as they had often helped the professor gather other queer prizes, they were not at all squeamish about handling the serpents. Ned got one, and Bob the other, holding them until Jerry came up with the boxes, into which they were thrust, and the covers fastened down.

"Are they safe?" asked Mr. Snodgrass, from his position on the ground, where he was still held by the stone.

"All safe," replied Jerry, with a smile. "Now will you let us attend to you?"



"I will now—yes," answered the scientist. "But I'm not hurt. I'm just held fast by the rock. Its weight rests on some other stones, and doesn't press much on my foot. If you can pry it off I can get up, I think."

The rock was a large one, and, as Mr. Snodgrass said, was kept from all but a slight contact with his leg by a sort of arch of other loose stones.

"Here's a big tree branch we can use for a lever," said Mr. Brill, as he brought the limb up, and stuck one end of it beneath the stone. While he and Jim Nestor pried on it, raising the big boulder, Jerry and his chums assisted the professor to crawl out, and in a few seconds he was free. He could stand up, but when he tried to walk he limped.

"You'll need some liniment," was Jerry's opinion.

"Never mind about me!" exclaimed the collector. "Where are those snakes? We must get the others, too. I saw a lot of 'em here, but most of 'em got away. It was when I made a jump for the two that I slipped, and sent a lot of rocks rolling down the side hill. Then I was caught and pinned fast. But I had hold of the snakes, and I knew you would come along, sometime, and rescue me."

"You have had a narrow escape," said Jerry,

as he handed his friend the two boxes containing the serpents.

"That's what he did!" exclaimed Harvey Brill. "That nearly happened to me in the landslide after I had hid the gold. But are you sure you're all right, Professor?"

"Sure! Of course! Oh, you little beauties!" exclaimed the scientist, as he gazed at the wriggling snakes. "How glad I am that I found you! You'll be worth hundreds of dollars to the museum, and all the other collectors will envy me. I think I'll write a book about these snakes," he went on. "I must stay here a long time, and make a study of them."

"Well, if you will, you will, I suppose," laughed Jerry. "But we've got to find the gold."

"Did you get any trace of it?" asked the scientist.

"No, I'm sort of off my bearings," replied Mr. Brill. "But I'll soon pick up the trail again. We're going to start at the other end of the valley."

"But we might as well wait until to-morrow for that," suggested Jerry. "It is late afternoon now, and will be dark soon. Then, too, we can stay here with the professor, and let him study the habits of the snakes. To-morrow will do to start off for the gold again."

They agreed with him, and the professor, after putting his two latest specimens safely in the airship, began making notes about them, ignoring his slight lameness.

"We must get some more specimens," he declared. "They are around here."

"But they don't seem to be luminous snakes," objected Bob. "They don't give off any light, and they look just like some of the snakes back in the East, except that they're of a different color."

"They don't give off any light until night," explained Mr. Snodgrass; "but I'm sure they are the right kind. Will you help me to get some more?"

Everyone was eager to oblige the scientist, and, after the airship was anchored, they began to search among the rocks for the luminous snakes. They were not easy to locate, however, and several times the boys, in their enthusiasm, made grabs for snakes which the professor laughingly declared were worthless, as far as saving them for museum specimens was concerned.

"You must look at the markings before you pick up the snakes," he told the lads, and then he described how to detect the luminous snakes from the other specimens. Harvey Brill could tell the queer serpents at a glance, and he was the first

to capture one of those that had eluded the professor.

So eager did all become in their strange quest, searching in and out among the rocks, that they did not notice a figure slip over the edge of the precipice that hemmed in the valley, and dangling from the end of a lariat held by a number of men on top of the cliff, slide down to a fairly good foothold. Nor did they notice this same figure creeping and crawling along amid the rocks, keeping out of sight as much as was possible.

Had they observed this figure—a man—they might have recognized him as the same one who had so suddenly changed his destination in the railroad station that day—the man with the scar. But they did not see him, so eager were they to get more snakes for the professor.

And the man who had made the bold and successful attempt to enter the valley, at one of the very few places where such an attempt was feasible, crept on, murmuring to himself:

“At last I’ve got ’em just where I want ’em! They’re in our power now, and as soon as they dig out that gold I’ll signal to the others and we’ll surround ’em. It’s going to be hard work getting down here, though, and I doubt if we can all make it. That Nixon fellow is too big a coward, and so is that Bill Berry, though if it

hadn't been for them I wouldn't have gotten on the trail so easily. But here they are, and as soon as they have the gold which that fellow hid, well——"

The man did not finish, but, creeping on, was soon so near our party of friends that he could hear their talk. He had managed to keep himself hidden, though probably if Jerry and the others had not been so intent on looking for the snakes they might have seen him.

"We must hurry," remarked Jerry, after they had found two or three more snakes lurking in crevices of the rocks. "It will soon be dark."

"I think we have nearly all of them," spoke Harvey Brill. "There aren't many more hidden away."

"Those are the nuggets he hid," whispered the sneaking man to himself. "I'm glad I waited until they dug them out for us."

"Here's another!" suddenly exclaimed Bob, making a dive down in the stones. He was close to the hidden grub-staker, though the stout lad did not know it.

"Oh, I shall be a rich man!" exclaimed the delighted professor. "Every one is a prize!"

"And we'll be rich when we get 'em away from you," murmured the hidden man. "Things will soon be coming our way."

He raised himself up, and took a cautious ob-

servation. He saw the boys and men grouped about a small cavern in the rocks—a cavern where most of the luminous snakes had been found. At that moment Jerry made a grab, crying:

“Here’s another!”

“And about the last one,” added the professor. “I think those are all I counted. We have enough, anyhow,” and he took the wriggling snake which Jerry held out to him.

The hidden man saw it. A great change came over his face. It grew red with anger, and then white from disappointment.

“Snakes!” he hoarsely whispered. “Snakes! Great Peter! They’re after snakes and not gold! I’ve been stung! They are with that scientist after all! Snakes! Not gold! Oh, what chumps we are!” and he sank back out of sight as the party turned to go to the airship.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE EMPTY POCKET

"WELL, part of our quest is finished, anyhow," remarked Ned to Jerry, as they entered the *Comet*. "We've got the snakes. Maybe we'll get the gold."

"Of course we'll get it" exclaimed Harvey Brill, with decision. "Do you think I'm going to let your folks lose their money? I guess not! I'll get the gold I hid, or I'll find some more. I want to complete the deal on that mine, and I can't do it unless I get those sixty nuggets. Oh, I'll find 'em all right, as soon as we start to come up the valley from the other end, so I can pick out my landmark."

"I hope so," murmured Jerry, for he, as did the others, wanted "to make good."

"Yes, we got the snakes, and maybe we'll get the gold," said Bob, as he went to the kitchen to see about preparing the evening meal. "But I don't believe those serpents are luminous." He had glanced at them on his way from the main cabin, where Professor Snodgrass was enthusi-

astically making notes about his latest prizes. "If they don't shine to-night," went on Bob, "Mr. Snodgrass will surely be disappointed. But I hope he isn't."

Could the hidden man have heard what our friends said, about not having found the gold, he might not have felt so chagrined as he got ready to rejoin his companions on the cliffs. But he had only overheard the talk about snakes, and had seen the boys and the men hunting for the serpents. He had not heard gold mentioned.

"This sure is the limit!" he muttered, as he crawled away from his hiding place, now that the coast was clear, the party being in the airship.

"Here I go and follow these fellows on a hard trail, thinking they're after gold, and it turns out to be snakes! I get 'em to lower me over the cliff, and 'most break my neck, all for the pleasure of seein' 'em catch snakes. Bah! I'm a fine one, I am, and it's all that Nixon fellow's fault! I'll settle with him! He said they were after gold, and it's snakes! Wow! Snakes! I'll be the laughing stock of all the grub-stakers along the Border. There's been a slip-up somewhere, and I can't tell where it is. Yet I was sure that one of those fellows was the one who was said to have hidden the gold. But it was snakes! Bah! Snakes! This is the limit!"

He made his way through the gathering dark-



ness to where his party anxiously awaited him. It was hard work hauling him up by means of the lariat, and once he slipped, severely hurting his back.

"Did you get a trace of it?" eagerly demanded Noddy Nixon, who was one of the throng on the cliff.

"Was all the gold hidden where we saw 'em digging," asked Bill Berry.

"Say! Don't talk to me!" sullenly replied the man, as he limped along. "This has been a fizzle, and it's all your fault!" he added, turning to Noddy. "Don't talk to me! And don't you dare say snakes or gold!"

By degrees, however, the disappointed party got the truth from him, and many were the expressions of anger against Noddy. And yet he was not so much to blame. Though he had managed to spy and eavesdrop enough to learn that Jerry and the others were after gold, and though he had managed to trace the course of the airship sufficiently to pick out the location of the valley after a long trip on a lonely trail, still some of the others had before this tried to rob Harvey Brill, and they had been as eager as was Noddy to take up the mean work again.

"Huh! Snakes!" exclaimed Jake Paxton, the man who had gone down in the gulch, as he and the others moved away from the top of the cliff

in the darkness. "Now we've got it all to do over again, for I'm sure someone has hidden gold in that valley, and I'm going to get it. We'll just stay here a spell yet."

In the airship there was rejoicing mingled with uncertainty. The professor was glad because he had found the snakes, but the others were a bit uncertain in regarding to finding the sixty nuggets, though Harvey Brill was positive that his quest would be successful.

"Of course the landslide mixed things up," he explained; "and it isn't going to be as easy to find the place as I thought. But I'll do it!"

"Supper!" announced Bob, at this juncture, and for once no one joked about his fondness for always having something to do with eating. They were all hungry.

"Where's the professor?" asked Jerry, as they filed out into the dining cabin. "He must be——"

"Boys! Boys!" suddenly called the scientist. "Come here—quick!"

"Trouble again!" cried Ned, as he made a rush for the professor's cabin, whence came his voice.

"Those snakes!" murmured Jerry. "Maybe, after all, they are poisonous!"

"Quick! Quick!" yelled the professor, and, as they reached him, breathless, Jerry asked:

"What is it; are you hurt?"

"Hurt? No!" exclaimed the little scientist, and there was triumph in his tones. "Look!"

He pointed to a small box on his table, and from it came a subdued glow, as though a whole box of the old-fashioned sulphur matches had been dampened.

"The luminous snakes! exclaimed Professor Snodgrass. "See them shine with light! They are the true *illustris serpens*! I am a most fortunate man! My name will be engraven on the roll of fame! For years I have sought these snakes, and now I have some! Oh, my college will be proud of me!"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Ned. "They do shine!"

There was no doubt of it. The professor had only one light dimly going in his cabin, and now he switched this off. The glow from the box of snakes increased, until it made the room light enough to distinguish faces.

"What makes it?" asked Jerry.

"The same sort of matter that causes the lightning bugs to glow," explained the professor. "Under the skin of the snake is a certain material, mixed in with the color pigments, and that becomes excited by the nerve cells acting on the circulatory system. In fact——"

"Well, anyhow, they shine!" interrupted

Ned, with a laugh, for sometimes the professor got on one of his long scientific explanations, and hardly knew when to stop, he grew so enthusiastic about it.

"Yes, they shine!" exclaimed Mr. Snodgrass. "My search has been successful."

"And I hope ours will be," remarked Jerry, as they went to rather a late supper.

They made an early start the next morning, heading the airship for the farther end of the valley, intending, on reaching it, to turn and come back, so that Mr. Brill could pick out the stone that resembled a church—the stone that served as a landmark for the hiding place of the gold. The going trip was quickly made, but, though they kept a lookout for the stone, no one saw it.

"I don't believe we could pick it out going this way," explained the prospector. "But it will show soon enough when we head back the other way, and get near it."

As Mr. Brill was fairly sure that he had hidden the gold some distance from the lower end of the valley, little time was spent there, once they had begun the return trip.

It was about noon, and Bob was just thinking of getting dinner, when Mr. Brill, who was in the pilot house with Jerry, remarked:

"Go slow, now. I think it's somewhere around here."

The *Comet's* speed was reduced, and a little later, as they swung over a pile of fantastically heaped-up rocks, the prospector cried:

"There it is! There is the stone near where I hid the gold! Let's get out and hunt for it!"

He pointed to a mass of rock that did bear a close resemblance to a church, steeple and all. It was a much more realistic resemblance than the other had been.

"That's her all right!" asserted Mr. Brill. "Things have changed considerable though, since I hid the gold, but I guess that's on account of the landslide. But there's the pocket all right, where I put the nuggets," and, as they had all gotten out of the airship, he pointed to a crevice near the great stone—a fissure in the side of the valley partly filled with rocks.

"The gold is there!" cried Harvey Brill, pointing with a shaking hand. "I took it out of the sacks, and put it in there in a wooden box."

Jim Nestor had brought a pick, and he now attacked the loose stones with vigor. A few minutes sufficed to clear out the fissure, or pocket, where Mr. Brill had deposited the nuggets.

"Why—why—it's empty!" gasped the mine foreman, as he got to the bottom. "There isn't any gold here, Harvey! And no box, either!"

"No gold there!" cried the prospector, aghast.

"Not a nugget! The pocket is empty!"

## CHAPTER XXVII

### A PERILOUS SEARCH

SURPRISE and disappointment held them all silent for a few moments after Jim Nestor had made the momentous discovery. Jerry was the first to speak, and he asked:

"Are you sure this is the place, Mr. Brill? Might you not be mistaken? There are so many big rocks, and from here I see another that looks something like a church."

"No, this is the rock all right," declared the prospector. "Look, here is where I left one of the sacks that I carried the nuggets in," and from under a small pile of rocks that held it down he picked up a canvas bag.

"That's right!" exclaimed Jim Nestor, scratching his head in perplexity. "But where is the gold?"

"That's what we've got to find out!" exclaimed Ned.

"Are you sure this is the sack you left?" asked Bob of the prospector. "Maybe some of the

grub-stakers dropped this here when they were searching for the gold."

For answer Mr. Brill held out the sack, and silently pointed to the initials "H. B." marked on it in ink.

"I put 'em there," he said. "I'd know 'em anywhere. It was one of the three sacks I had the sixty nuggets in. I took the others away with me, but as they bulged out my pockets so, I left this one here, after I put the nuggets in a box. Oh, there's no doubt that this is the place where I hid the gold."

"But what has become of it?" asked Professor Snodgrass, who, now that he had found his snakes, consented to take an interest in other matters.

"Those fellows got it!" declared Jim Nestor. "They got ahead of us after all, and they've taken it!"

"It looks so," agreed Ned. "What had we better do?"

"Take after 'em right away!" declared Harvey Brill.

"That's right!" agreed Bob. "We'll have dinner, and start the chase."

"Yes, be sure and have dinner first," remarked Jerry, half sarcastically. He was bitterly disappointed over the failure of their expedition. So were the others, as their faces showed.

"We ought to be able to catch up to 'em in the airship," was Mr. Brill's remark.

"But we can't tell how long ago they were here," said Jim Nestor. "It's been some time since you hid the gold—isn't it, Harvey?"

"Yes, some time."

"Well, the only thing to do is to start, I suppose," said Jerry, wearily.

He advanced toward the airship, with a glance at the empty pocket where the gold had been.

"Stop!" suddenly exclaimed Professor Snodgrass, catching hold of Jerry's sleeve. "I'm not so sure the gold has been taken away—at least by a human agency."

"What's that?" cried the tall lad.

"I say I'm not so sure the gold has been taken away."

"But it's gone; isn't it?" demanded Ned.

"Yes. But let me ask Mr. Brill a few questions," went on the scientist. "I'd like to know," he continued, "if this place is exactly as it was when you hid the gold?"

"Well, no, not exactly," declared the prospector. "There have been quite some changes. Of course the big rock is just the same, but those around it seem to have been moved. And, now that I look at it again, I can see that the pocket isn't in exactly the same location."

"I thought so!" exclaimed the professor, in



triumph. "And now can you see any traces of water having covered this place since you were here?"

Mr. Brill glanced curiously at the scientist, and then looked carefully around him.

"Water?" he repeated. "Why, yes, now that you mention it, I should say there had been a sort of washout or flood here."

"Exactly!" cried Mr. Snodgrass. "And it's the flood that took away the sixty nuggets—not the grub-stakers!"

"A flood!" cried Jerry.

"Yes," went on Uriah Snodgrass. "The gold was washed out of the pocket by a rush of water. There have been heavy rains since Mr. Brill hid the nuggets. Or there may have been a cloudburst, or even an underground river may have burst to the surface after the landslide. Whatever happened, the gold has been washed away, but the canvas sack caught under a rock and was held."

"But where is the gold now?" demanded Ned, with hope in his voice.

"Scattered along the track taken by the flood," answered the scientist. "Look, you can see which way it washed," and, now that their attention was called to it, they could all see traces of the flood. There were ripples in the heavy sand, bits of driftwood, and marks on the stones that

showed how high the water had risen. It had swept on down the valley.

"We'll have to follow the track left by the flood," exclaimed the professor, "and we may find the gold that way."

"Good!" cried Ned. "Then everything isn't lost yet."

"Not by a jugful!" exclaimed Jerry. "We may get the gold yet."

Eagerly they began their search, but it was soon seen that it was not going to be an easy task. For, a little way from the big rock that marked the location of the pocket, they came to a wild and desolate part of the valley, where great stones lay piled loosely one on the other, ready to topple over at the least disturbance.

"We've got to be careful," warned Jerry. "We may be caught under some of those boulders."

"That's right," agreed Professor Snodgrass. "This is going to be a perilous search."

"But we won't give up on that account!" cried Ned.

"I guess not!" agreed the two Westerners.

The party halted for a short time for dinner, and then resumed looking for the gold. The marks of the flood were plainly to be seen, and put them on the right trail.

"Look low," advised Mr. Snodgrass. "Gold

is about the heaviest metal there is, and it will lodge low down. Look at the very bottom of where the flood swept."

Their search was indeed perilous and full of danger. Several times one or the other of them just managed to get out of the way as a big boulder came crashing down. But they found not the slightest trace of gold. It all seemed to have vanished.

Bob, who had strayed ahead of the others, leaped from one stone to another to get into a little depression where he thought he might find some of the yellow nuggets. As he did so he dislodged a small stone, which fell with a crash.

The silence that followed was broken by a menacing growl, and Bob, looking quickly ahead of him, saw, crouched on the trunk of a dead tree, a tawny yellow body—a mountain lion ready to spring!

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE SIXTY NUGGETS

FOR a moment the boy and beast stood gazing at each other. Bob felt a chill of fear run through him, and, as he saw the quivering of the brute, and noted the switching tail, he felt that he wanted to scream—to cry out for help.

Bob noticed that the mountain lion was inch by inch edging itself along the tree trunk, to get to the end.

“And when he does,” reasoned the boy, “he’s going to jump—and jump on me!”

He wanted to turn and look behind him to see how close his friends might be, and yet he steeled himself against any such action. For, somewhere, he had read that the best thing to do, when confronted by a wild beast, is to remain confronting it, looking it directly in the eyes.

“It’s my only chance!” thought Bob. “The minute I turn around he’s going to spring.”

He listened intently, but could hear no footsteps approaching, and realized that he had gotten far ahead of the others.

"Oh, why didn't I bring my rifle along?" thought Bob. "None of us did, I guess. We thought so much of the gold that we didn't dream we would need guns!"

Nearer and nearer crept the beast, and now, added to its quivering body and switching tail, there came low, menacing growls, to inspire more terror in the intended victim.

"It won't be much longer now," thought Bob. "I've just got to turn and run. I can't stand facing him out! I'm going to jump back, and maybe I can get behind a big rock, or something, long enough to yell for help. Here goes! I'm going to dodge!"

Something of his intention must have, in some way, been made manifest to the lion, or perhaps a slight movement on the part of the lad carried this intelligence to the beast. For, just as Bob was about to turn and flee, he saw the beast give a final quiver, and then, with a roar, launch itself into the air from the tree trunk. At the same moment a voice shouted:

"Fall, Bob! Lie down! Flop to the ground!"

Wondering why this advice was given, but recognizing that it came from some of his party, the stout lad threw himself forward. He saw the beast hurling itself toward him, and, a second later, there came a sharp report.

The body of the mountain lion seemed to crum-

ple up, to become a knot in midair, and then, fairly turning a somersault, the beast crashed to the ground just beyond where Bob lay.

"Roll to one side! Get out of the way!" yelled the voice again, and Bob had presence of mind enough to obey. He knew that the beast, in its death agony, might reach and claw him. So Bob, being unable to do anything else, rolled to one side. Then, if ever, he was thankful for his fleshiness, for he did not so much mind the rough rocks over which his course took him.

Once more there came the cracking sound of a shot, and then Bob, raising his head, saw the body of the lion give a final quiver and lie still. It was dead.

"Great Peter, that was a close call!" exclaimed Jim Nestor, coming up as Bob arose. "I was afraid I couldn't plug him with my revolver, but I managed to do it."

"Did—did you shoot?" asked Bob, for his breath was still a little short from the fright and the exertion. "Did you shoot him, Jim?"

"I did, I'm thankful to say. I was following you up, looking for the gold nuggets, when I happened to see the pickle you were in. I knew there was no time to yell to the others for help, and less time to go back for a rifle. I happened to have my big revolver with me, but I knew it was taking desperate chances trying to plug a moun-

tain lion with it at that distance. But it was all the chance I had, and I took it."

"And you winged him," observed Bob, thankfully, as he looked at the dead body. It was a large specimen of the mountain lion family.

"Yes, I was lucky enough to get him with the first bullet," went on the miner; "but I took a second shot to make sure. He was coming right at you; wasn't he?"

"He was that!" exclaimed Bob, as he shook hands with Jim, and there was much meaning in the clasp of their palms.

"What's the matter? What happened?" cried Jerry, running up from behind a turn in the trail. He was followed by the others. "Is anyone hurt?"

"That fellow is," replied Bob, with a short laugh, as he indicated the lion with his foot.

"Oh!" exclaimed Jerry, and then he understood, though Bob insisted on giving details.

"Well, after this," spoke Ned, "we had better take our guns with us. There may be more of the brutes here."

"I shouldn't wonder," replied Mr. Brill. "I know one chased me when I was here before. Yes, we'd better go armed."

"And keep closer together," added Jerry. "Hi, Professor!" he called, for the scientist had wandered off some distance to the side. "Don't go so far. Come here!"

"Have you found the gold?" shouted Mr. Snodgrass, as he came running up.

"No, and it doesn't look as though we would," said Ned, half discouragedly. Then the professor was told of what had happened, and urged to remain near the others.

"Yes, we'll find it!" declared Harvey Brill. "Even if it was washed out of the pocket where I hid it, we'll find it sooner or later. Those nuggets can't have been washed out of the valley."

"But the valley is a big place, and besides, Noddy Nixon and his crowd may come back any time, and make trouble for us," went on Ned.

"Oh, you must have a grouch!" exclaimed Jerry, with a grin. "Don't cross the bridge of trouble until you hear the rustling of its wings," he misquoted.

Once the excitement caused by Bob's danger had passed, the party resumed the search for the gold. They followed the course of the flood, plainly visible, but, after looking carefully for some distance, they found nothing, and even Mr. Brill began to look disheartened.

"I think we had better bring the airship down this way," suggested Jerry, late that afternoon, when they had gone about two miles from it. "We won't do any more prospecting back there, and we might as well have the comforts of it with us, and not have to retrace our steps."

They agreed with him, and alone Jerry went



for, and brought up the *Comet*. Then, after a short search about the vicinity of her new anchoring ground, they gave up work for the day, as it was getting dark.

"We'll find those nuggets sure—to-morrow!" declared Mr. Brill.

But they did not, nor on the next day, though they searched carefully. Even Professor Snodgrass forgot his desire for new specimens in the wish to help locate the treasure. But it seemed that it was gone forever, having been washed away by the flood and landslide, and deposited in some new hiding-place destined never to be found. Mr. Brill was much discouraged, and the others shared his feelings.

"I guess we'll have to go back home and report a failure," said Bob, gloomily. "Anyhow, we haven't got much more grub, and maybe we'd better take a flight out of here and get some—that is, if we're going to keep on with the search."

"And that's just what we're going to do!" exclaimed Jerry. "We're going on with this search. What are you talking about, Bob? There's grub enough for a long time yet. Don't you worry."

The next day they took up the search again, but with hearts growing more and more despondent all the while. Several times Jerry looked off to the distant cliffs, as if to see if he and his companions were being watched by the grub-stakers, or

Noddy Nixon. But if their enemies were there they did not show themselves.

It was coming on toward evening. They had again moved the airship, and had passed the middle of the valley.

"We're on the Canadian side of the Border now," remarked Mr. Brill, as he grubbed around among the rocks.

"Are we?" asked Ned, indifferently. "Well, I don't see that it's any luckier for us than the good old United States were."

They were about to give up the search for the day. The sun was just sinking down behind the cliffs of the valley, when Professor Snodgrass, who had wandered off to one side again, gave a cry. It was a shout of delight.

"He's found something!" yelled Bob.

"The gold! Is it the gold, Mr. Snodgrass?" asked Jerry.

"No!" was the disappointing answer. "But oh, boys come here! I have just seen the largest and most perfect specimen of a yellow jumping spider I ever laid my eyes on! Bring me a small net and a box, while I keep him in sight! Oh, you beauty. You are almost as valuable as the luminous snakes!" and the scientist fairly danced up and down in front of a hole in the rocks.

"A yellow jumping spider!" half groaned Ned. "I thought he had found some of the nug-

gets." Still, as the professor had always helped them, they could do no less than to act as he requested. Bob brought an insect net from the scientist's room on the airship, and Jerry got a specimen box. Ned and the two men followed to where Mr. Snodgrass stood.

"Where is it?" asked Mr. Brill, somewhat indifferently, as the scientist got ready to make his capture.

"Down there, between those two stones," was the answer, and Mr. Snodgrass pointed. "See that yellow lump? That's a fine yellow jumping spider. I——"

But Mr. Brill interrupted him with a yell.

"Yellow jumping spider!" shouted the miner. "Not in a thousand years! Great Peter, boys! The professor's gone and done it!"

"Done what?" demanded Jerry.

"Found the sixty nuggets of gold! Hurray! That's no yellow spider! It's a yellow nugget—one of the big ones! Wow! We're on the trail at last, for where there's one there'll be more! Yellow spider nothing! That's yellow gold!" and plunging his hand and arm down in the hole between the loose stones, the miner brought up a lump of yellow gold as large as his fist.

"The first of the sixty nuggets!" he shouted. "Now to find the others!"



"THE FIRST OF THE SIXTY NUGGETS!" HE SHOUTED.

*Motor Boys on the Border*

Page 224



## CHAPTER XXIX

### INTERNATIONAL COMPLICATIONS

EXCITEMENT was intense among the gold-seekers. They crowded around Mr. Brill, eagerly examining the nugget so strangely found, weighing it in their hands, and rejoicing over its discovery.

"That's one of the sixty!" repeated the miner, over and over again. "Now to find the other fifty-nine!"

But this was not going to be so easy as they imagined. Feverishly they searched among the rocks and dirt, but when darkness finally fell they had only recovered eleven of the lumps of gold, some larger, but most of them smaller than the first one.

"But we'll get the rest in the morning," declared Jim Nestor. "The box they were in must have upset when it was washed away, and they spilled out."

This was the explanation accepted by everyone, and, while they were disappointed in not recovering all the gold at once, they felt that they had good chances of ultimate success.

"For it stands to reason," said Ned, "that the rest of the gold is somewhere around here, and if we trace the course of the flood we'll find it."

Jerry and Ned were awakened early the next morning by hearing Bob moving about the airship. It was so very early that it was scarcely light, and, for a moment they could not imagine what was going on.

"I say, what's up, Chunky?" demanded the tall lad, leaning on his elbow in the comfortable bunk of the aircraft. "It can't be time for breakfast; is it?"

"It isn't light yet," added Ned. "What's the matter, Bob? Can't you rest?"

"I can sleep as good as you fellows," was the retort, "and I don't see why, every time I move around, you think I have either got to eat a meal, or start cooking one. I'm getting tired of it."

"I should think you would be, Bob," commented Jerry, with dry sarcasm. "But, seriously now, what is going on?"

"I'm going to start looking for the rest of the nuggets, that's all."

"Why, they won't run away," declared Jerry, somewhat astonished at the unusual energy displayed by the stout lad. "Can't you wait until after grub?"

"The quicker we find them the sooner we can

start back home," replied Bob. "That is why I got up so early. I want to begin the search as quick as it's light enough to see, and it soon will be."

"You must have some reason for the haste," put in Ned.

"I have."

"Can't you tell us?" urged Jerry.

"No," and Bob's voice was a trifle short. "I'm going out to have a look around. When you fellows get through snoozing you can come and give me a hand. The professor's up."

"Oh, he never sleeps," commented Ned, with a yawn. "Well, if you get up, Bob, I'm going to have another forty winks," and he turned over and pulled the blankets around his neck, for it was chilly in the early mornings.

Ned paid no further attention to his stout chum, but Jerry regarded Bob curiously as the latter went out of the airship.

"There sure is something up," decided the tall lad. "I wonder what it is? Chunky has something on his mind, and he doesn't want to tell what it is. Maybe he has seen something of our enemies, and he wants to hurry away from here before they get too active. But, in that case, I should think he'd tell us. I guess I'll go out and see what he's doing.

Jerry tried to arise and dress quietly, so as not



to disturb Ned. But the latter's ears were sharp, and he turned over with a quick:

"Say, have you got the early rising bug, too, Jerry?"

"I thought I'd see what ailed Bob."

"Nothing, only he's hungry, I'll wager, and he doesn't want to admit it."

"But he's out there looking for nuggets, and he didn't take a bite to eat."

"He didn't! Then there sure must be something wrong. I guess I'd better get up, too; though it's a shame, for I could have had another nap. It's early yet," and Ned glanced reproachfully at his tall chum, and then at a clock on the wall, its dial faintly illuminated in the light of the newly-dawning day.

"Nobody's pulling you out of bed," retorted Jerry. "But it's hardly fair to let Bob do all the hunting alone, even if he did get up of his own accord."

The boys dressed silently, not wanting to arouse the others in the craft, though Professor Snodgrass was already up, as he usually was, before dawn each day, to get insects and bugs that were only abroad at that early hour.

"Find any, Bob?" sung out Jerry, as he neared his stout chum, who was walking along, his head bent over, making a course along the recent flood, as nearly as he could trace it.

"Nope," was the somewhat gloomy response. "There doesn't seem to be a one. But maybe, now that you fellows have condescended to come out, we may pick up a few. Scatter out a bit, so we won't go over the same ground twice," he added, as Ned joined them.

"Look here, Chunky!" exclaimed Ned. "You must have some object in getting up so early and beginning this search."

"I have. I want to find the nuggets."

"I know, but you must have a special reason. What is it? If it's trouble, Jerry and I have a right to know. We're just as much in this thing as you are."

Bob looked cautiously around. No one was in sight save Professor Snodgrass, and he was so much engaged in trying to creep upon, and capture, a specimen of an eight-toed lizard that was trying to get away that he had no idea the boys were even up.

"There is a reason," went on the stout lad. "I want to find the nuggets as soon as we can, because our food supply is running low, and I know Mr. Brill won't want to leave here until we get the last of the sixty nuggets. So the quicker we find them the sooner we can leave, and get stocked up again. We can't get anything to eat here."

"That's right," agreed Ned. "But I had no

idea our stock was so low. We must have eaten a lot."

"You mean *Bob* must have," put in Jerry.

"Look here!" cried the stout lad; "I didn't eat any more than the rest of you—that is, not much more," he added, quickly. "But our food is fast going down. Maybe we didn't calculate right. Anyhow we've been here longer than we thought we would. Now I don't want to starve, so I decided that I'd put in all the time I could on locating these nuggets. That's why I got up so early."

"I knew there was eating in it somewhere or other," declared Jerry, with a nod of his head.

"Oh, yes, you knew a lot, you did!" retorted Bob. "Always casting it up to me. I wish——"

"Say, cut it out, you fellows," advised Ned. "If it's as Chunky says, I don't want to waste any time, either. Let's get busy."

"I thought you'd get sense," murmured Bob.

Together they hunted along the course of the flood, separating so as to cover as much ground as possible. But that early-morning search was unavailing. The light gradually became better, the golden sun, flooding down into the valley; but even the bright rays did not reveal any of the yellow nuggets amid the rocks and stones.

"I guess it's going to take longer than we thought," remarked Bob, gloomily.

"Say, just how much longer will our food last?" demanded Jerry.

"Oh, well, maybe a week, or a week and a half," began Bob, "but——"

"A week!" cried Ned. "And you've been throwing this scare into us with a week's rations on hand! Getting me up, to lose my beauty sleep, and all that!"

"I'd duck him if it wasn't so far to the water," groaned Jerry.

"Well, a week's supply isn't any too much," declared Bob, defending his course. "Come on, now. We might as well keep on searching until it's time for breakfast. It will give us good appetites, and it's early yet."

"As if you needed an appetite," muttered Jerry, as his eyes roved over the ground.

Professor Snodgrass, giving over his attempt to capture the particular specimen he was after, came up to where the boys were.

"Have you found anything?" he asked.

"Nothing in your line, I guess, Professor," answered Ned. "We were looking for— Look at that!" he cried quickly. "There may be something you want, Mr. Snodgrass. There! Right between those two black stones!"

"It's some sort of a toad. Wait, I'll get it for you before it can hop away," and Ned was about to plunge his bare hand down in a crevice among

the stones, when the little scientist sprang forward and drew him back so forcibly that the lad sprawled on the ground.

"What—what's the matter?" gasped Ned.

"That toad!" cried the scientist. "It's deadly poisonous. It's a spined toad—not a horned one, though it looks like that species. It's worse than a rattlesnake. If you had touched it and it had poisoned you, why, you might have died, though some persons have been known to recover. Never touch one."

"I—I thought you'd like it for a specimen," murmured Ned, frightened by his narrow escape.

"So I would, but it must be handled with a net. I'll show you. I didn't mean to pull you back so quickly, but I once had a friend who nearly lost his life because of a sting from one of those creatures, and I thought you would touch it before I could stop you. Ah, now I have it!" and, with a quick motion of his insect net, the scientist captured the ugly-looking creature, which was soon painlessly killed by the cyanide-bottle process.

Then they resumed their search for the nuggets, but by breakfast time they had found none.

However, after the meal, which Bob looked at as though it might be their last, they resumed their quest. Eagerly they searched, and before noon they were rewarded by locating a few of the precious nuggets. Then they became more eager,

dividing up the territory so as not to cover the same ground twice.

So busily were they engaged—even Professor Snodgrass doing his full share—that none of them thought to take an occasional observation of the distant cliffs. Had they done so, they might have seen several figures looking down at them, though for the most part, the figures kept well concealed.

And, had they heard the talk that went on among the spies they would have felt they had good cause for alarm, for one of them was Jake Paxton, the man who had been lowered over the cliff.

"I guess there's no fake about it this time," said Paxton. "They're not after snakes now."

"I knew they'd look for the gold sooner or later," declared one of the party.

"Well, you were right after all, Noddy," came the retort. "And now we've got to consider how we can get it away from them. I guess the mounted police will be our best play."

Meanwhile Jerry and his friends were finding nugget after nugget. They were considerably scattered by the flood, but once the gold had rolled out of the box, it had sunk, and had not been carried more than a comparatively short distance.

"Well, if we had three more we'd have 'em

all," said Bob, toward the close of that memorable day. "We have fifty-seven so far."

"Fifty-eight!" cried Ned quickly, as he stooped and held up another of the yellow lumps. "We only need two more."

"Let's let them go," suggested the stout lad. "I'm afraid our grub——"

"Drop that, Chunky!" cried Jerry. "We'll stay until we get the whole sixty nuggets, if we have to live on half rations!"

Bob groaned, and hastened off to the kitchen to take an account of the food remaining. He came back, looking rather serious, but said nothing.

"Those two last nuggets aren't so very large," suggested Mr. Brill. "If you boys want to go back——"

"We'll get 'em all!" exclaimed Jerry. "The folks back home expect us to, and we will. Why, there's no special hurry, and I'm sure we'll find them soon. I——"

"Here's one!" interrupted Jim Nestor, as he located a small lump of yellow metal, where it had lodged between two stones. "And great Peter!" he yelled a moment later, "here's the twin! Hurray, boys! We've got 'em all—the whole sixty nuggets of gold!"

"Good!" cried Jerry, while Bob said:

"Now we can go, and we won't have to

starve," and there was a brighter look on his face.

It was true enough. A count showed that every one of the sixty nuggets had been found, and it was good work, considering how scattered they had been. But the searchers had certain advantages on their side, and nature, in a way, had aided them.

"Well, I reckon we'll start for home in the morning," remarked Bob, a little later that evening, when they were seated about the supper table. The sixty nuggets were piled in a box in the cabin, where all could see them, and they glowed richly yellow in the glare of the electric lights.

"Yes, we've gotten all we came for," spoke Jerry, "and I guess we can leave the valley in the morning. Our quest couldn't have been any more successful."

"And I got what I came for!" exclaimed the professor, as he looked at his luminous snakes. "I wish I could have gotten a yellow jumping spider," he went on with a sigh; "but I will look for that next."

"All's well that ends well," quoted Ned. "And now I'm going to turn in—I'm tired."

It began to rain in the night, and when morning came our friends faced most disagreeable weather. It was cold, and a strong wind dashed



the rain against the windows of the motorship. But they did not mind the elements now, for, snugly within the *Comet*, they did not feel their inclemency.

"Here we go!" cried Jerry, soon after breakfast. "Turn on the gas, Ned, and we'll go up as a balloon until we get out of this valley. I don't want any accidents."

The great motorship arose, and through the mist and rain ascended from the valley of the luminous snakes and the sixty nuggets of gold. The wind increased in violence as they got above the protecting sides of rock, and when they reached the top of the big gulch the *Comet* was fairly heeled over in spite of her powerful propellers.

"Some blow, this!" gasped Jerry, as he labored to shift the rudder.

"Can we weather it?" asked Jim, who was in the pilot house with him.

"Oh, I guess so. But I'll be glad when it's over."

"We're on the Canadian side," returned Mr. Nestor, as he looked down, and took note of the landmarks.

"We'll soon be in our own country," went on Jerry, "though we could make it quicker if this wind wasn't against us."

Hardly had he ceased speaking when from below them came several sharp cracks, and at the

same time the airship seemed to hesitate and falter. Then it began to sink slightly.

"What's the matter?" yelled the miner.

"Something's wrong with the gas bag!" answered Jerry, who saw by the vapor gauge before him that they were losing buoyancy. Then from the observation cabin where he had gone, Bob yelled:

"There's a crowd just below us, and they're shooting at us, too! They're aiming at the gas bag!"

"I thought so!" murmured Jerry. The *Comet* lurched to one side, and settled more and more.

"Shut off the motor, Ned!" cried the tall lad. "We've got to go down!"

They descended gently, in a comparatively level place, and as Jerry could tell that there were several punctures in the gas bag, he turned off the supply of vapor, and set the pump going that forced it back into the steel container, where it was compressed. The big bag collapsed into its frame.

They had come down on top of the cliffs surrounding the valley, and, hardly had they settled than a crowd of horsemen rode up, surrounding them. Jerry saw that one or two wore the uniform of the Canadian mounted police, and, to his surprise, in the throng were Noddy Nixon

and Bill Berry, and the man with the scar whom the tall lad had seen in the railroad station.

"What does this mean?" yelled Jim Nestor, angrily. "Why have you shot at us?"

"To stop you," replied one of the police. "We are sorry, but it was the only way. We had to stop you."

"What for?"

"Because you are taking over the Border gold secured in the Dominion of Canada, in violation of the international law. You must give up that gold. It belongs to the Crown."

"It does not! It belongs to me!" yelled Harvey Brill.

"Our information is to the contrary," spoke the leader of the police. "We regret that we had to fire on your balloon, and are sorry if we damaged it much. But in a case like this, involving international complications, it was the only thing to do. We had to stop you before you got over the Border."

"And who told you this gold was not mine?" asked Mr. Brill.

With a motion the police officer indicated Noddy Nixon.

"I thought so," murmured Jerry. "Well, we'll fight this thing out to the end now. I see his game!"

## CHAPTER XXX

### A FLIGHT BY NIGHT

"YOUNG man," said the chief of the mounted officers, "I heard what you said, and I want to warn you to be careful." His tone was firm, but respectful, and Jerry, looking at the group of those surrounding the crippled airship, saw a grin of malicious delight on the face of Noddy Nixon.

"We are going to stand up for our rights," said the tall lad.

"I can't blame you for that," went on the officer. "But don't talk of fighting. We are in authority here. I might add that under the circumstances, and in view of the information given to us, we could only act as we did and halt you."

"Do you know the whole story?" asked Jerry.

"No, but I am informed that you are citizens of the United States, that you have in your possession gold taken from the Dominion of Canada, and that you propose to take it into the United States, across the Border, in violation not only of the customs laws, but of the international

law regarding treasure as well. Is that correct?"

"Well, I suppose it is—in a measure," admitted Jerry. "But I should like to tell you the whole story. Will you come in, you and the other officers?"

"We will be glad to," said the mounted man, in more genial tones. "We are sorry for what we had to do, but we must enforce the laws."

"That's all right," said the tall lad. "Maybe you'll feel differently after you hear all the facts."

The men tied their horses to some trees, and approached the airship through the mist that was falling. Noddy and some of his cronies started to follow, evidently not liking it in the storm.

"No, you don't!" cried Jim Nestor, barring the way of all save the police. "You fellows can stay out. Harvey, get busy here. There's some undesirable citizens trying to get in," and the two Westerners proved an effectual barrier against the plotters.

Jerry lost little time in telling the story of the search for the gold, adding his suspicions of how Noddy Nixon had followed them, and joined forces with the unscrupulous men who had first tried to take Mr. Brill's wealth from him.

"It is true that we found the gold in Canada,"

explained Jerry; "but it was washed there, after being dug in the United States, and only by accident did it get over the Border. We surely had a right to recover our own property, and bring it back."

"Hum! That puts a different face on it," said the chief officer, obviously much puzzled. "I did not know that. I will have to report to my superiors," he went on. "It will take some little time, and I am sorry for the delay caused you. If what you say is true, and I have no reason to doubt it, we have no jurisdiction over you. I shall at once ride to the nearest telegraph station and make a full report of the matter to my superiors. Then if everything turns out as I expect it will, you may go."

He and his companions left, after Jerry had insisted on their taking some hot coffee which Bob made. As they got outside, the mounted police were surrounded by Noddy and his cronies, eager to learn what had taken place in the airship. That they were disappointed by the outcome was evident.

"They're going to have their own troubles getting hold of this gold!" declared Mr. Brill, grimly.

"And if they make any move toward my luminous snakes!" exclaimed the professor, "I—I'll fight 'em—that's what I will!"

The mounted officers rode off in the storm, and Noddy and his companions made a rough camp not far from the stalled airship.

"What are you going to do, Jerry?" asked Ned, as dinner time drew near. "Stay here and wait for those officers to come back?"

"I am not!" declared the tall youth.

"What then?"

"We leave here to-night!"

"To-night?"

"Yes. I know what the decision will be—in our favor—and there is no use staying here and taking chances with that crowd," and he nodded toward the campers.

"The gold is ours," he went on, "and we have a right to take it where we please. The mounted police admitted as much. It was all a bluff on the part of Noddy's crowd to make trouble. Maybe they thought they could, in some way, get possession of the nuggets. But we'll fool 'em. We'll slip away to-night—after dark."

"But how can we—when the gas bag is full of holes?" asked Mr. Brill.

"We'll go as an aeroplane," declared Jerry. "There is enough level ground here for a start, and those police won't be back before morning."

Night settled down, a cold, windy, stormy night, and Noddy and his cronies in their camp were anything but comfortable. They seemed

to be waiting for the return of the police, but the Westerners expressed the belief that the lawless men might try to rush the airship after dark and take the gold.

"We'll stop 'em if they do," declared Jim Nestor, grimly.

Strict watch was kept, and in the shelter of the craft Jerry and his chums went over all the machinery. They would not need to use the gas apparatus to get over the Border.

"I think there's something doing out there," reported Mr. Brill, about nine o'clock, coming in from the outer deck where he had been keeping watch on the camp. "It looks like they were coming this way."

"Let 'em come," replied Jerry. "We're ready to start. Turn on the motor, Ned!"

With a rush and a roar the *Comet* shot across the ground. There was a chorus of surprised cries, and one or two rifle shots. Then, like a bird, the motorship sailed aloft, leaving the disappointed plotters behind.

"We're off!" yelled Ned.

"For the good old U. S. A.!" added Bob.

"Over the Border, and all the mounted police in Canada can't touch us!" spoke Jerry, gleefully. "I think we've fooled 'em. They didn't think we would, or could, go."

The cries and rifle shots died away in the



darkness and the *Comet* swept on, out of danger.

Of the return trip little need be written. By morning they were over the Border, in their own country, and out of Canadian jurisdiction. They found a good place, and made a descent to repair the gas bag, for they could not tell when it might be needed. The storm was at an end, and in the sunny weather their spirits revived wonderfully. Many times during the course of the repairs they stopped to look at the gold, while Professor Snodgrass lovingly viewed his luminous snakes.

"Oh, but we sure had adventures this trip!" exclaimed Ned, when they were ready to start off again.

"Yes, it came near to beating anything else we ever did," agreed Jerry.

"I guess we'll have to settle down now, for a while," remarked Bob.

"Settle down! I guess not!" cried Jerry. "We'll have some more fun as soon as we can," and how they did it, and what it was, will be related in the next volume of this series, to be called "The Motor Boys Under the Sea; Or, From Airship to Submarine."

Once more they were on the wing. The *Comet* swept along at wonderful speed and soon they were back at Kabspell, where they intended to

take their motorship apart, and go home by train, with the gold and the professor's snakes.

Everything went off well, and the troubles they had coming West were not repeated on the trip East. How Noddy fared with the grub-stakers who sought to get the gold they did not learn for some time later, but they did hear that the mounted police returned to the place where they had left the airship, intending to report that they had no jurisdiction, and that Jerry and his chums could do just as they pleased. But the motor boys had done it anyhow.

The gold proved to be of more value than was thought, and the syndicate of the boys' parents received their money back with good interest. Jim Nestor and Harvey Brill purchased their mine, and are still working it. In fact it paid so well that Mr. Brill could help most of his poor relations, including the stout aunt. Jake Paxton and Ike Weldon, the chief plotters of the grub-stakers, got into trouble soon after their disappointing trip to the Border, and had to flee the country. Noddy and Bill came back, much chastened in spirit. The Blackfeet Indians, after their little excursion, were safely driven back on the reservation.

"Well, I wonder if Professor Snodgrass got his luminous snakes safely to the museum?" said Ned to his chums one day several weeks later.

"Yes, I had a letter from him," spoke Jerry. "He said he had received another honorary degree. He's got more letters to his name now than ever."

"But, all the same, he's a nice man," observed Bob, who was munching a piece of cake, his chums having called at his house.

"That's what he is," agreed Ned. "Say, let's go for a motorboat ride, and talk over where we'll spend the summer vacation," and with the motor boys thus on pleasure bent we will say good-bye to them.

THE END

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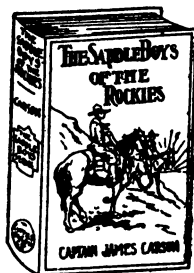
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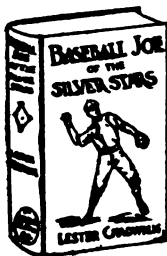
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